

Gilbertsville man brewing quite a business

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GILBERTSVILLE — Something unusual is brewing in Don Wilson's basement.

This month it's two large casks of deep-red, cherry-flavored wine.

Wilson loves making his own wine and beer at home so much that earlier this year he turned it into a small business. Although he doesn't sell his homemade vintages or brews, he does sell wine- and beer-making kits and a myriad of supplies on the Internet and out of the garage of his Hampton Circle home.

"People don't realize how easy it is to make, or that it hardly costs anything to make this stuff," said Wilson.

When he's not busy tinkering with a new wine recipe or taking care of his new business venture, Wilson Wine & Beer Supplies, Wilson is working full time as a designer for Pottstown-based Videotek Inc.

He also breeds dogs as a hobby and generally "likes to have many irons in the fire." Wilson said he became interested in trying to make his own alcoholic delights at home just by becoming a wine connoisseur out at restaurants with friends.

"I'd go out to dinner and people would say "Let's get a Merlot" and I'd think about what makes that particular wine a Merlot," Wilson said.

Another reason for starting the business was to bolster his own wine cellar.

"That was always a dream of mine to have a wine cellar and then have friends over and impress them with it," he said.

The wine aficionado is so proud of the wine and beer he's been making at home, that he decided to enter several examples

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of each in a contest at the recent Kimberton County Fair.

Among competition of about 40 other applicants, Wilson's Riesling took first place among the sweet wines, and his "Wilson Lite Lager" took first in the beer competition. His Merlot took second place in the red wines, and his "Wilson Rules Red Ale" also captured second place.

"I was really flattered about the contest," Wilson said. "My customers and friends were the competition, and it was a lot of fun."

Of all the wines he has made so far, Wilson said his favorite is a blackberry oak-flavored wine. But he is always experimenting with new ingredients to try to make some really unique wines. His apple spice wine is good heated in the wintertime, while his strawberry wine hits the spot chilled on a warm summer night, he said.

Among the supplies Wilson sells online and from his home are beer- and wine-making boxed kits, purees for making fruit wines, chemicals and enzymes, corks and corking mechanisms. And if you have no place to put the wine after you make it, he even sells various colors of empty wine bottles.

He also sells juices imported from Italy and Canada, sugar extracts for making soda, and kits to make brandy.

"I've used these products to make wine from Bing and sour cherries, apple juice, strawberries and blackberries," Wilson said. "And I don't think many people know this but the wine you can make with these kits has less sulfites in it so it's actually healthier for you."

Initially, Wilson bolstered his inventory with supplies leftover from a Pottstown store which closed over the winter. He designed his Web page and business cards by himself, and for advertising he just put the business phone on the side of his car. He said he has found a lot of interest locally.

"This opportunity to sell these products came along so I figured I'd give it a try. I thought other people would be interested too, and as it turns out about 85 percent of my business is in the Reading, Pottstown and Norristown areas," Wilson said. "Then about 10 percent is from the Internet and five percent pick-up. And the nice thing is, there's really not a lot of overhead, but there's definitely money in it."

Though the supplies are displayed in a very orderly and professional manner in a corner of Wilson's two-car garage, he said he is thinking about moving the display into a storefront.

"I'm not really pushing the issue of expanding right now," he said. "The key to business is always to start out slow and not overstep yourself. It's been a lot of fun."

Wilson Wine & Beer Supplies can be reached via the Internet at www.zyworld.com/wilsonwineandbeer or by phone at 610-473-WINE or 800-779-2082.