

Black Bear Farms medal count keeps rising: add 10 more!

By Bryan Jessop

With the Summer Olympics fast approaching, there will be entire nations envious of the medal count collected by Black Bear Farms for 2012.

The Kingsville-area winery added 10 medals to its collection through entries in the 2012 Finger Lakes International Wine Competition and the All Canadian Wine Championships, both held annually in mid-spring. The family-run Black Bear Farms of Ontario Estate Winery Inc. won six medals from eight entries in the Finger Lakes competition — hosted by Rochester, NY — and four medals from six entries at the Canadian championships, held in Windsor less than a month later.

In Rochester, Bear's Special Blend (non-vintage) captured gold while Elderberry (2008) won silver and Strawberry and Red Raspberry (non-vintage), Black Currant (2010), Red Raspberry and Purple Plum (2008) and Golden Plum (2008) each earned bronze. More recently in Windsor, Papa's Special Reserve (2007), Bear's Special Blend (2009) and Strawberry and Red Raspberry (2009) were each awarded bronze in the Soft Fruit Reserve group while Black Currant (2010) nabbed double gold and Best of Category in the Soft Fruit Off Dry segment.

"We're very happy. You never know how it's going to go at these competitions. When Black Currant won double gold in Windsor after getting bronze in New York, I was really surprised," said William Rondelez, who operates Black Bear Farms along with his mother, father, older brother and younger sister. The Rondelez family also owns and operates Main West furniture stores in Leamington and Kingsville.

Since it began competing at the two annual events in 2009, Black Bear Farms has collected 36 medals, a total that has prompted the Rondelez family to build a third shelf for their award winners. This year's Finger Lakes event drew 3,200 wines from 22 countries, including the United States and Canada. The 2012 Canadian event included 1,103 entries from 168 wineries.

Black Bear Farms makes fruit wines exclusively, without using grapes in any of its creations. The facility rests on 83



William Rondelez of Black Bear Farms of Ontario Estate Winery Inc. displays winners from the 2012 All Canadian Wine Championships (four at left) and the Finger Lakes International Wine Competition (six at right), held in Windsor and Rochester, NY, respectively. **(SUN Photo)**

acres, with 60 planted for the ingredients of future wines. Currently, the Rondelez family is in the planning stages of a couple new blends and has a new blueberry wine on the shelf bottled as a 2011 vintage. Another new variety of blueberry wine is on the way.

"We have fun doing it," William stated.

The process of making each bottle of wine, done entirely on site, takes an average of one year. Wines are allowed 30 to 60 days to ferment, followed by a six- to eight-month period to settle. After a filtration process, the wine is bottled.

William explained that it is normally the newest varieties and those that have won medals in previous years' competitions that are selected to represent Black Bear Farms for up-

coming events. The family plans to participate in the Finger Lakes and All Canadian competitions again next year.

The establishment's flow of customers has been increasing steadily, with customers regularly arriving from across Essex County as well as the American states of Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky and New York. Visitors from Virginia recently bought half a case of Black Bear Farms wine and plan to return later this summer. Some bottles made by the Rondelez family have made their way to Japan, Hawaii and the Cayman Islands.

Black Bear Farms is located at 1137 County Road 20 and is open 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday.