

# Business Examiner

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Business Profile - Grape Expectations

## Celebrating 15 years of growth, service and fun

By Goody Niosi

**COURTENAY** - Grape Expectations in Courtenay has reason to celebrate. This June Grape Expectations, the city's premier wine and beer U-Brew, will mark 15 years in business and as owner **Jutta Eger** puts it, that's fifteen years of growth, great service and fun.

Jutta points out that celebrations will take place all month long and customers – or potential customers – can expect to have even more fun than usual in a shop noted for its philosophy of making sure that both staff and customers have a good time.

“Our store is totally different,” Jutta says. “Our employees actually enjoy working here. I try to make a happy, fun environment. We’ll burst into song if we feel like,” Jutta admits that the “bursting into song” routine can be an “uh-oh” but it’s still fun.

Grape Expectations is warm and friendly. Hugs are not unusual. Jutta points out that most people who come in as they shop around for a U-Brew, shop no farther. And fun isn't the only thing Grape Expectations offers. The store also produces wine and beer of exceptional quality.

“We take care with it,” Jutta says. “We talk to the client about what they want. We’ll customize it for sweetness; we’ll customize it for oaking; we want to give the customer exactly what they want and it takes some time to discuss that with them. And then when they decide what they would like, we take the care to make it properly.”

Of the eight employees at Grape Expectations, four work in the back, tending to the product, making sure it's the best possible product they can make – and that it's what the customer wants. Customers at Grape Expectations also have an amazing



**Jutta Eger - Co-Owner of Grape Expectations**

*Photo courtesy of Carl Tessmann*



**Dick Leach - Brewmaster for Grape Expectations**

*Photo courtesy of Carl Tessmann*

range of choices. At any one time, the shop carries about 400 wine kits from all over the world. Choosing can almost be overwhelming. The shop is also dedicated to staying on top of the latest trends and having the newest wine trends in stock.

Jutta and her husband **Dave Tingley** opened the store in 1995. They had moved to the Comox Valley from Alberta determined to start their own business. A U-Brew seemed the right choice, given Jutta's long-time passion for wine. The first shop they opened was in Comox and covered only 900 square feet – but it

space. But it isn't only the physical space that is inviting. The staff makes all the difference, Jutta says. “People love coming here because it's an outing for them. We don't throw the client into the bottling area and let them go at it. We're interactive. The staff helps customers wrap and label and shrink and they chat with them. It's very interactive.”

The wine at Grape Expectations is fabulous but so is the beer. The brewmaster, Dick Leach, has been honing his craft for 35 years. The beer is made in copper kettles and the varieties, named after local landmarks, get rave reviews. In fact, beer lovers have to reserve for their fresh batch of beer.

“It's fresh beer,” Jutta says. “It's fresh hops – it's not from a can or a box – it's freshly brewed in the kettles and that makes a huge difference for quality and taste.”

Grape Expectations offers superb service for all beer and wine lovers, including the home brewer. Home kits and accessories are available for every home brewer. The store also takes in frozen fruit from customers year round to make special fruit wines and hosts an annual grape crushing event.

People bring in their own grapes and the store crushes them outdoors – hundreds of pounds of them every year.

“We hope to continue to be successful and to continue to grow every year,” Jutta says. “We want to make this as good as it can get – and I don't know that there are any limits on that.”

*Grape Expectations is at 10-2663 Kilpatrick Avenue in Courtenay. [www.grapegroupies.ca](http://www.grapegroupies.ca)*

was a thing of beauty. Jutta recalls that her husband hauled old timbers out of the forest and created a rustic grape arbour out of the store that was so picturesque the shop became a tourist attraction.

However, it took only two years before Grape Expectations had outgrown its premises and moved across the hall in the shopping centre into 2,700 square feet. They operated out of that space for eight years and when the mall closed for renovations they moved to Courtenay – a move that would have been necessary anyway, Jutta says, because they had a need to service both their Comox and Courtenay clients.

Today Grape Expectations operates out of 4,400 square feet of clean, warm, friendly and inviting