

# Sonoma's Free Flow leads wine-on-tap market



## SLIDE 1 OF 20

Jordan Kivelstadt, proprietor of Free Flow Wines, has moved his enterprise from Napa to Sonoma's Carneros Business Park. (Photo by Robbi Pengelly/ndex-Tribune)

## LORNA SHERIDAN

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Free Flow Wines, a pioneer in wine-on-tap distribution, has moved its headquarters back to Sonoma Valley. Its CEO and co-founder, Sonoma resident Jordan Kivelstadt, wants to be the industry leader not only in kegged wine, but also sustainable practices and technological innovation.

Free Flow's 90 employees now operate out of a 58,000-square-foot facility at 21945 Carneros Lake Lane, off of Eighth Street East.

More than 250 wineries now use the kegging services of the company founded by Kivelstadt and colleague Dan Donahue. Industry website Wine Business.com described Free Flow as "the leader in keg wine sales." The company claims to control 80 percent of the market, and the tracking service Nielsen said that in 2017, wine on tap sales grew by 37 percent.

Wines in Free Flow kegs and cans are available at restaurants, hotels, retail stores, and sports and entertainment venues across the country.

Locally, Benziger, Imagery and Kunde wineries all package wine in kegs through Free Flow. El Dorado Kitchen and Sigh bubble lounge also serve wine on tap through the company.

Trade publication Drinks Business named wine on tap one of the seven consumer trends to watch in 2018.

Sonoma has actually been slow to adopt wine in kegs compared to neighboring towns like Santa Rosa and Petaluma, says Kivelstadt, despite the fact that he says it offers the hospitality industry a "greener, fresher" way to serve wine by the glass.

"We're able to present wine consistently at the exact temperature it was intended to be served," said EDK's Matt Jetson. "And the simplicity of the system is a benefit when the bar is really busy."

But what really gets Kivelstadt excited is the impact he thinks Free Flow is making on driving sustainability in the wine industry – as wine on tap avoids the disposal of countless bottles.

Kivelstadt estimates Free Flow has kept millions of bottles from reaching landfills. The company's slogan: "We're saving the world one keg at a time."

"You throw your glass bottle into your recycling bin and, unfortunately, the U.S. recycling rate for glass is about 27 percent so that means three out of every four bottles you throw in your recycling bin ends up in a landfill," he said, reflecting U.S. Environmental Protection Agency glass-recycling estimates.

Free Flow was launched in Sonoma in 2009, and then expanded to Napa and added an East Coast production facility in Bayonne, New Jersey. Its new Sonoma facility has highly-automated wine kegging and canning lines – and can fill more than 150 kegs an hour. Plans for the new facility include a high-speed canning line and increased office space.

Kivelstadt has invested heavily in the move back to Sonoma. He said that Free Flow has invested \$2 million in the keg line and \$5 million in the canning line. His team has also developed a system to reduce the company's water consumption and reuse it.

"What we have now in this facility is a state-of-the-art wastewater recycling system," he said. Freeflow can now process 30,000 gallons of water seven days a week at about a 96 percent recycling rate, according to Kivelstadt.

Kivelstadt is excited about what he believes Free Flow is bringing to Sonoma Valley.

He says, "Nobody in Sonoma Valley... has the manufacturing infrastructure at the level of scale automation and technology that we have."

Kivelstadt also owns and runs Kivelstadt Cellars, which was founded by his parents, Nancy Kivelson and Tom Angstadt, in 2005. His last name, and the winery's name, is a combination of their last names. The winery opened a tasting room in downtown Glen Ellen in 2015.

Kivelstadt describes himself as proud to be a part of the local business community. "I think there's some really cool things happening in the Valley right now."

Kivelstadt, 37, is also busy raising two small children with his wife, Clare Rase. In his spare time, he's passionate about the "great work" being done by Sonoma's Mentoring Alliance, where he has sat on the board since 2017.

He stressed how excited he is to be an active part of Valley life.

"I live in the Valley, I own two companies here," he said. "I believe in doing good things in and for the place we live."

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