

Mexico's president hears from Napa vintners

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Napa Valley Register

Thursday, February 14, 2008



Winemaker Oscar Renteria pulled out five bottles of his finest vintages for a special guest Wednesday.

Renteria was among a handful of Latino winemakers and vineyard owners who got the rare opportunity to meet Felipe Calderon, president of Mexico, during Calderon's tour of California. The Sonoma County encounter with the president was both comical and charming, Renteria said.

"He took a sip of our Stag's Leap Cabernet ... and it got on his shirt," Renteria said.

Within minutes Calderon had slipped in and out of the bathroom, fresh shirt on his back, to continue talking with Renteria and the others, Renteria said.

"He is very mild mannered, he dressed very casually (and) he was very approachable," Renteria said. "Actually, he knows my dad. So we talked about the families. They all spoke about how proud they are of people who are here."

Calderon's visit to the valley was a show of support to those who are living and working here, making wine and giving back to their countrymen in Napa and Mexico, Renteria said.

"We are at a critical juncture between Mexico and the U.S. with immigration," Renteria said. "(He said) we need to do everything we can to support and unite people who are here."

Calderon also told the group that he would do everything he could to provide economic aid to Mexicans living in California.

Vintners hoped the president could make it less expensive to export their wines to Mexico, Renteria said.

Before coming to Robledo Family Winery in Sonoma for the gathering, Calderon spent some time in Sacramento, where he met with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and made a speech that touched on the interdependency between Mexico and California.

Wednesday's visit at Robledo Winery had heavy security and protesters as well as wine. Sonoma County Sheriff's Department deputies and

the California Highway Patrol joined forces with the president's security detail and stationed themselves around the winery grounds.

Guests were required to arrive early to be searched by members of security, dogs were brought in to smell the wine and sharpshooters with high-powered rifles watched over the president. A contingent of demonstrators set up shop in front of the winery to protest Calderon's visit and his views on immigration, while inside Calderon mingled with prominent Latinos.

Calderon left Sonoma around 5 p.m., and headed to Los Angeles where he was scheduled to meet with Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

For winemakers such as Renteria, the president's visit to the valley meant that his term is likely to be friendly to Mexicans living in California.

"You could see his biggest smile came when he was around the simple guys," Renteria said, referring to five of Robledo Winery's farm

Workers who were invited to the event. "He was very proud to talk to them and very proud of Robledo and the different heads of the families. He sent a very clear message. ... he made all of us feel really good."