

# Votto Vines

old world values, new world visions



The Tenuta La Marchese vineyard in Piedmont that produces the Leone d'Oro Gavi wine

BY DIANE CRESPY

In 2008, in the middle of the nation's greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression, five young entrepreneurs in New Haven, Connecticut, ranging in age from 23 to 30, decided to launch a wine importing and distribution company that also featured agritourism.

Four years later, at a time when many small businesses are still struggling under the weight of a sluggish economy, Votto Vines Importing has posted back-to-back years of 150-200% growth. The company also has guided two luxury agriturismo wine estate tours in Italy and facilitated one of the largest private label wine programs in the world in collaboration with LiveNation Licensing and Warburn Estate.

## the team

A key feature of Votto Vines is its family orientation. The five principals, **CEO Michael** and **Sr. VP Nicholas Votto** are brothers. Joining them are their cousins, **COO Peter** and **CFO Stephen**, who also are brothers. A brother-in-law, **VP Jeremy Jerome**, is in charge of sales and distribution; while another cousin, **Leah Votto**, is the company's leading sales representative and contributes to its public relations efforts. All share a love of Italian food and wine, but bring to the company diverse professional training and experience in law, engineering, economics, management and tourism.

Michael has a law degree; Peter has expertise in wine-making and importing; Stephen, a trained economist, has extensive business experience while Nicholas has a degree in recreation and tourism and Jerome holds a business management degree.

The young team believes its shared Italian heritage and broad range of expertise will allow their company to create a niche in the international wine trade. Thus far, the combination of youth, energy and entrepreneurship has proven successful. "Our company motto, 'Old World

Values, New World Vision' captures our approach to this business," says Nick Votto.

### old world values

The Votto family's history is familiar to most Italian Americans. Their great-grandparents left Italy in the early part of the twentieth century. They came from the towns of **San Salvatore Telesino**, **San Lupo** and **Vitulano** in southern Italy's Campania region. They worked hard, saved their money and insisted that their children and grandchildren receive a good education.

More than 100 years later, the family's journey came full circle when the third generation of Vottos returned to their Italian roots by establishing a wine importing business that focuses on family wine producers in Italy whose values, work ethic and loyalty mirror the upbringing of the founders in Southern Connecticut.

"They're a young firm with a great concept," said **Anthony Rescigno**, president of the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce, in a recent feature on Votto Vines in the *New Haven Register*. "We're grateful we have businesses that are starting up in these very difficult times," he

said. "This one has the potential to be very successful."

### new world vision

Votto Vines began as an importing company focused on small, family producers in Italy whose wines had not been previously imported to the United States. One of its first steps forward came in 2009 when the firm signed a licensing agreement with the Order Sons of Italy in America (OSIA), popularly known as the Sons of Italy.

"The **Leone d'Oro** wine program we launched three years ago with the Sons of Italy began slowly," says CEO Michael Votto, "but thanks to OSIA's national executive director, **Dr. Philip Piccigallo** and the *Wine Spectator Magazine's* recent 92-point rating of the **Leone d'Oro VINO Nobile di Montepulciano**, we are seeing renewed interest in the program and a concerted effort by all parties to create a successful and lasting wine brand in the U.S."

Now Votto Vines has branched out into other estate and proprietary wine brands as well as other partnerships, including a wine brand connected to The Borgias television program with Showtime Networks and a line of wines with



The Votto Vines Team: [L. to R] Michael Votto, Peter Votto, Nicholas Votto, Stephen Votto, and Jeremy Jerome.



A luncheon during one of Votto Vines agriturismo tours in Chianti, Tuscany.

Wine Spectator

**VECCHIA CANTINA DI MONTEPULCIANO**  
 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Leone d'Oro 2008

This delicious red bursts with juicy black cherry, raspberry, tobacco and mineral flavors. This is harmonious and supple, despite its tannic structure. Plays for intensity rather than sheer power. Best from 2012 through 2025. 800 cases made. (Oct 15, 2011)

WineSpectator.com

celebrated musician, BB King. They have also expanded their wine portfolio to include wines from Spain, Argentina, South Africa and Australia, while keeping Italy's wines the focal point of their portfolio. Most of their wines are reasonably priced, ranging from \$10.00 to \$25.00.

"We've secured partnerships with organizations and wineries around the globe; had over a dozen wines rated 90+ points by Wine Spectator, Robert Parker's Wine Advo-

cate, Wine Enthusiast and Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar over the past 12 to 18 months; and have the backing of a solid group of investors," says COO Peter Votto. "Old World values; New World vision" seems to be working well for Votto Vines Importing. For more information about Votto Vines, see [www.vottovines.com](http://www.vottovines.com) or email [info@vottovines.com](mailto:info@vottovines.com).

*Diane Crespy is director of development at the Sons of Italy's national headquarters in Washington, D.C.*

## THE LEONE D'ORO WINES

Votto Vines has an exclusive partnership with the Sons of Italy, the nation's biggest and oldest Italian American organization, as its sole U.S. wine importing partner. Together they are developing the *Leone D'Oro* line of fine Italian wines.

The *Leone D'Oro*, (Golden Lion), is the Sons of Italy's official logo. For the first time in its century-plus history, the Sons of Italy has begun directly importing and marketing a select line of Italian wines it has personally chosen and entrusted with its own official logo. "The wines selected are of high quality and exceptional affordability," says OSIA's Dr. Piccigallo. "And include Prosecco, Gavi, Chianti and the aforementioned *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano*." For more information about *Leone D'Oro* wines, see [www.osia.org](http://www.osia.org) or call 202/547-2900.

