

Guest Column: The Faces of Hospitality

Most of us who live here start as visitors but then are captivated by the Islands' magic, inspired to create an island life. This series of columns will help put faces to small businesses – restaurateurs, innkeepers, shopkeepers, artists, tour captains, and other entrepreneurs who make our communities so unique and vibrant.

Marti McConnell's love for wine has followed her everywhere she has lived. She lived in Yakima—the original wine country of Washington—most of her adult life and came to the Islands often for kayaking and vacation. She loves the natural beauty here and moved here for that—the sea, the salt air, and everything that lives in it—orcas, eagles, otters, limpets. She's a naturalist and loves to be on the water. The natural world. The grape vine climbing up the maple tree. The tide washing ashore, right on schedule. The first sprouts of crocus in the spring. The stars, predictably in place.

When Marti was finally able to move here full time, she took a job at San Juan Vineyards and her interest in wine became her full-time gig. Archipelago was born from that passion. She says, "I love the pockets of brilliance the islands attract; there are circles of very intense people everywhere—artists, scientists, naturalists, musicians, and each of them is highly focused on their passion. When those circles intersect, it's magical."

How does tourism benefit the Islands?

Marti says, "visitors come here for many reasons, not the least of which is to have the chance to see orcas in the wild. Our wildlife tours are a highlight for many visitors, and our naturalists are experts in educating the public about the animals we love and the issues they face. This education helps the world understand the islands' history and the difficulties our ecosystems face. We need the public's support and understanding in order to make a difference. Talking with visitors reminds me that we are blessed to live here. People come here from around the world to take in the natural beauty. I love to ask how they found the Islands and hear their journey. Every conversation with a visitor is an opportunity to see the island with fresh eyes. We have regular customers at the Farmer's Market, and not just locals. I love seeing the same visitors come year after year, taking a photo and then taking wine to their family's favorite island traditions."

Archipelago has become increasingly involved in the creative community. Their support of the Friday Harbor Film Festival, Archipelago Collective, San Juan Islands Museum of Art, San Juan Community Theater, the Arts Festival, and others they hope will help to knit together the various interests and talents in the islands. Winemaking is very artistic. It is the process Marti loves. The cooperative nature of taking a raw material, understanding its character and potential, and guiding it through the process to become the best possible

product and still express its true inner personality. It's very much like producing a concert or a sculpture or a scarf. "It's what we all want for ourselves, really – for someone to come alongside and guide our development into the best possible self we can be. In a small community like ours, we all benefit from supporting each other and our common interests."