



Observations From the Seat of a Bike

*By Stan Boyd, owner of Boy Family Vineyards and a Director on the
Napa Valley Grapegrowers Board*

Recently I had the opportunity, along with three other members of the Napa Valley Grapegrowers, to ride my bicycle across the United States. During the two month journey from San Diego, California to St. Augustine, Florida we visited town after town that unfortunately were either dead or dying. This observation got me thinking about how fortunate we are to live in the Napa Valley but also caused me to question why all these towns are in serious economic decline while our community is growing. Riding your bicycle for 8-10 hours per day gives you time to contemplate issues such as this and here are my observations.

Once leaving the west coast we headed into the interior of our country on back roads visiting communities the size of our five towns here in Napa Valley; American Canyon, Napa, Yountville, St Helena and Calistoga. Many, in fact most of the towns had vacant downtown storefronts, closed businesses and an atmosphere of despair. After talking to the local residents we usually found that the decline was brought on by the mill or the mine or the factory closing or the railroad no longer stopping at the town or the interstate looping outside the community.

It became apparent to me that virtually all these communities were dependant on one business that, when removed, caused the entire community to crash in upon itself. One business was the dominant employer - when they were removed, there was an economic collapse of the community. It became abundantly clear to me that local economic stability is dependent on a diverse employment base so that the loss of a single employer does not destroy the entire economic engine.

In our Napa Valley community we are fortunate to have over 1,500 winegrape growers providing the economic engine and environment for strong stable long term growth. Our agricultural based economy provides both the raw product for the wine industry as well as the enjoyable landscaping that millions of tourists visit annually. Napa Valley grapegrowers have invested their time and fortunes to build family businesses that have lasted generations and hopefully will last for generations to come. While some occasionally decide to sell their vineyards, there are always new or existing vineyard owners ready to buy and expand their holdings.

While some critics will say that we are too dependent on one industry I believe we are more diversified than it first appears. Winegrapes are all about the place where they are grown and Napa Valley is the premium wine growing region in our country (some would say the world.) Napa Valley vineyards are recognized globally for their quality and are attracting international investment. This recognition has

powered wine tourism in the Napa Valley to lead all other California wine tourism destinations in growth over 2010. New restaurants are opening and hotels are being added and expanded. New retail shops and tasting rooms are opening. The result is more new jobs and a business community that is strongly positioned to take advantage of an improving economy.

Furthermore, our community understands the value of investing in the future as recently evidenced by the extension of the Agricultural Preserve. The extension of this both protects the scenic beauty of our valley as well as the business activities that take place in the county. Both of these are critical to insuring the long term investment in agriculture that ultimately powers our local economy.

Wine consumption in the United States continues to increase, thus increasing demand for Napa Valley winegrapes. Additional vineyard development is very limited and the grower focus is on development of viticulture best practices and sustainable growing techniques. As grapegrowers we are committed to quality and long term sustainability of our vineyards.

So after riding 3,200 miles across the country it became obvious to me that we are very different from most other cities and towns of our size. What sets us apart from these other cities and towns is that we have a strong agricultural employment base that supports the wine industry and strong wine related tourism. Our community recognizes the importance of investment in the future to protect agriculture that is critical to our long term viability. This combined with increased demand for wine/grapes and a grower community focused on quality and sustainability virtually insure that we will not follow in the footsteps of the so many other communities that we visited. I'm proud to be a resident and stakeholder of the Napa Valley and feel fortunate to have the opportunity to live here.