

VINEYARD



GAZETTE

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Vineyard House Tests the Waters

By HOLLY NADLER

It's arguably the loveliest event in the summer season. For 14 years now, Vineyard House, the only substance abuse safe haven on the Island, holds a fundraiser consisting of "designer" waters to sip and sumptuous food to eat provided by Tea Lane Caterers. The venue is always breathtaking, but this one may be the topper — the Allen Farm in Chilmark, where sweeping views over sheep-shorn fields give over to the sparkling expanse of the Atlantic Ocean.

And there's another huge draw: The Vineyard's favorite native daughter, musician Kate Taylor, will be strumming her guitar and playing her much-admired songs. Four years ago the Water Tasting by the Sea fundraiser showcased Ms. Taylor, and the event proved the best-attended ever. Vineyard House president Mark Jenkins anticipates the same enhanced turnout on Thursday.

Kate Taylor has planned this occasion as her sole concert for the summer. Her music will replace the traditional live auction that attends the event, although a silent auction will be conducted as usual.

The cause is critical. We have a serious problem on Martha's Vineyard with alcoholism and substance abuse; the numbers are far higher than those on the mainland, sometimes almost twice as high. According to statistics from Vineyard House, 75 per cent of individuals admitted to the Edgartown jail have been arrested for alcohol and/or substance abuse. At the high school, 55 per cent of the students drink compared to 43 per cent nationally and 48 per cent statewide. As for binge-drinking, 39 per cent of our high schoolers report they binge-drink, compared to 26 per cent nationally.

Everyone on the Vineyard knows at least one person troubled by substance abuse, be it a friend's son, a landscaper, a doctor, a spouse or . . . oneself.

Summer visitors buy signs for their cottages declaring Welcome to Paradise. Yes, scenically we reside in paradise, but why the higher numbers of folks who need to escape into drinking and drugging?

Psychologists point to the long winters, unemployment, isolation, loneliness and despair as causes for substance abuse. Our suicide rate is double the state average. Double! That figure is nothing short of heartbreaking.

We desperately need a detox center here on the Island. People needing detox are required to wait until the morning to travel to a mainland facility such as Gosnold Treatment Center in Falmouth. By then the incentive to go sober has evaporated. There is no space dedicated to a detox and rehab unit in our new hospital. This isn't just a predicament for impoverished Islanders depressed

during the long winter: Poor folk and wealthy alike are plagued by alcoholism and substance abuse.

Meanwhile, since 1997, Vineyard House has served as a safe haven for people in early recovery. It's been shown that newly sober patients who return to their old environment of friends and families are recaptulating to addiction, if early in recovery they find themselves in the circumstances that got them drinking and drugging in the first place.

At Vineyard House, directors and volunteers serve as mentors, encouraging their clients to learn life-coping strategies. They're steered toward 12-step meetings sponsored by Alcoholics Anonymous and, perhaps most importantly, to socialize with each other and additional sober people in their age group, rather than jumping back into the typical Island bar scene.

And speaking of sober socializing, Mr. Jenkins chuckles when he mentions the fun to be had at the water tasting festivities. "You can party and still have a good time," he said. "Everyone is very relaxed."

The director of Vineyard House is grateful for all the familiar faces he sees at the event. "Art Buchwald was a big supporter," he said.

There have also been truly generous participants who have donated their stunning properties in the past: Ernie Boch's acreage along Katama Bay (replete with llamas and the famous donkey, Kramer), the Flanders Farm in Chilmark, scene of many idyllic weddings, Richard Friedman's Oyster Pond property, and now Clarissa Allen's and Mitchell Posin's ancestral farmland.

Mr. Jenkins is the perfect purveyor of improved living through fitness and health. He has published 13 books on science, nutrition and sports medicine. He has also published articles on related subjects in the Wall Street Journal, Rolling Stone and Atlantic Monthly.

This summer's Water Tasting by the Sea will be held on Thursday, July 28, from 5:30 to 7:30. It is open to all and tickets will be available at the door. For more information log on to vineyardhouse@vineyard.net or call 508 693-8580.