

Brennan brothers making the cut

Two siblings compete in horse cutting

ANDY WILCOX Mar 17, 2012

Planning Commission Mtg.

AUG 17 2016

Agenda Item # 9D



Justin-Siena junior Jake Brennan (left) and brother Christopher Brennan, an eighth-grader at Holy Spirit School in Fairfield, are among the top-ranked youths in the state in the equestrian sport of cutting. Andy Wilcox/Register



The belt buckle award earned by Christopher Brennan for finishing second by just two points in the Pacific Coast Cutting Horse Association Junior Youth Division in 2011. Andy Wilcox/Register

Success and fame go back generations in their family, and Jake and Christopher Brennan are already following suit.

The brothers are among the top performers in the West in the sport of cutting, where a rider on a horse gets two and a half minutes to completely separate two to three calves from a herd, one by one, and is judged on the performance. The horse, usually a quarter horse, bounces back and forth to prevent the calf from ducking past it and going back to the herd.

Jake, a Justin-Siena High School junior, and Christopher, an eighth-grader at Holy Spirit Catholic School in Fairfield who plans to join his brother at Justin-Siena next year, each earned Reserve Champion, or second-place, honors for their respective competition classes in the Pacific Coast Cutting Horse Association last year.

Jake won his award, an engraved belt buckle, in the Senior Youth division and Christopher earned his in the Junior Youth division. Jake also placed sixth in the \$2,000 Amateur division, which includes riders of all ages at shows held throughout California and the western states.

A few shows into the 2012 season, Jake is ranked first in the PCCHA Senior Youth and \$15,000 Amateur divisions, and Christopher is ranked second in the Junior Youth division.

Both started riding horses when they were 2 at the Oakville ranch of their grandparents, Clark and Lissa Miller. They've been showing horses at arenas since they were 5. In late 2009, they began participating in competitions with cutting horse trainers Jason and Dana Haefner in south Napa.

Jason Haefner, who has trained many successful cutting horses and riders at their facility on South Kelly Road, is also a director for the PCCHA and NCHA and judges shows.

"I feel so blessed that we have a great trainer in Napa because next closest good trainer is almost three hours away," Lissa Miller said. "Dana and Jason are great with the kids, and the kids love them to death."

Jake said he had watched cutting competitions before he began trying it himself as a seventh-grader, but it took a lot of practice to master it.

"I had no idea what to do at first. But over the summer that's all I did, ride from 7:30 to 4." he recalled. "When we went to more and more shows, it helped. There was one show where it kinda turned around for me ... From there it just felt like I could do it."

Jake balanced cutting practices as a freshman and sophomore with Justin-Siena JV football and baseball during the school year, playing linebacker and second base, and Joe DiMaggio baseball and a job during the summer. He went out for his first season of varsity baseball at second base this year, but suffered a season-ending injury — a torn rotator cuff — while throwing late last month.

The injury hasn't affected his cutting because it's on the side where he holds the reins, while his other hand is gripping the horn for dear life.

"It takes a lot of hours of practice," Jake said. "You can never get a perfect score because there's always something you can do wrong. But the more time you ride, the more it just gets easier and you know what you're going to do. Instead of having to think about it, it just happens."

Cutting originated in the Old West, when a horse that could select an individual cow for branding or medical attention was a cowboy's most valued possession. Competitions were held, and the National Cutting Horse Association was formed in 1946 and the PCCHA in 1950.

"You get judged on how you do, how the horse does, and what the cow does," Jake explained. "You can use your reins to get the cow separated, but then you have to drop your hands and use your feet, so the horse has to do all the work. You don't hurt the cow because they're just trying to run away from you. You can (have points deducted) for a lot of stuff, like if you lose the cow, if your reins are too short, how your hand is."

Christopher juggles cutting with basketball — his Holy Spirit team played in middle school tournaments held at Napa's St. Apollinaris Catholic School and Justin-Siena during the past few weeks. His equestrian sport is every bit as exciting as hoops, he said.

"It's fun because it's high-energy," he said. "Things can be moving really fast and you could lose this cow any time, so you're always on your toes. It took a couple of years to beat people, but there's one kid who always beats me."

Christopher lost last year's title to that rival, Brandon Westfall of Paso Robles, by only two points.

"Christopher was neck-and-neck for the season championship with a boy who has trained for many years and has a choice of five \$100,000 horses to ride on," Lissa Miller said of Westfall.

Miller said the turning point in her grandsons' cutting careers came last April at the National Cutting Horse Association Western National Championships in Ogden, Utah.

"It was the biggest show they'd ever been to and they got so excited, they said 'We want to come back here next year and win,'" Lissa Miller said. "They were doing great before that, but I think it took them up 20 notches. They were like 'OK, this is our goal now and we're going to get there.'"

Both qualified last year for the 2012 NCHA Western Nationals April 28 through May 8 in Reno.

Both Brennan brothers have grade-point averages of about 3.3 and also show pigs in a 4-H club.

"What they've done is phenomenal when you think that 90 percent of the kids they show against have been (cutting) since they were 4 or 5 because their parents are trainers and they're on a horse every day, all day, and a lot are home-schooled so that they can go on the road all the time with their parents."

While attending the PCCHA meetings held in conjunction with the awards dinner at Harris Ranch near Coalinga in January, Jake was named president and Christopher was named secretary of the PCCHA Youth Board.

They competed Friday at the PCCHA Core Balance Derby Classic/Challenge in Paso Robles, but the trip to the week-long competition was about more than cutting for them. As PCCHA officers, they must attend a meeting, help run a youth booth and set up the Seniors Appreciation Dinner.

They are keeping up a family tradition with their successes and leadership roles.

Their maternal grandfather, who passed away in 2008, was NFL defensive end Clark Miller, who played for the San Francisco 49ers from 1962 to 1968, the Washington Redskins in 1969 and the Los

Angeles Rams in 1970. He and his wife Lissa, who still lives at the Oakville ranch they bought in 1968, were involved in breeding quarter horses and competitive cutting for three decades.

- Their mother, Robin, was a standout swimmer and volleyball player at St. Helena High, and her brother, Matt, starred in basketball for the Saints before playing four years at USC. Robin also attended USC and now teaches the fourth grade at Holy Spirit.
- Lissa Miller's great-great uncle, Coke Roberds, was the first quarter horse breeder in Colorado and was inducted into both the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City and the American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame in Amarillo, Texas.
- The boys' father and Robin's husband, Michael Brennan, worked in Washington, D.C. in the 1980s in high-ranking positions for the U.S. Department of Labor, the Social Security Administration and the U.S. Department of Labor. His father, Jack Brennan, was post-presidential chief of staff for President Nixon during the Watergate scandal and is played by Kevin Bacon in the movie "Frost/Nixon."

B Cellars acquires historic Oakville property

Register Staff May 9, 2013

B Cellars is relocating from its present location on Silverado Trail in Calistoga to an historic property in the Oakville appellation.

Known as the Vintage Oaks Ranch, the 11.5-acre property at 701 Oakville Cross Road, was acquired by Bill Cameron, Chairman and CEO of American Fidelity Group, a longtime investor in B Cellars, in partnership with the winery's co-founders, Duffy Keys and Jim Borsack.

The property was owned by the Miller family where for nearly a quarter of a century where they raised champion-caliber horses. Prior to the Millers, the property was part of a larger dairy farm operation, and before that, had several other agricultural uses — the first recorded deed for the property dates back to 1875.

Vineyard plans for the estate will focus primarily on cabernet and will be farmed in accordance with California Certified Organically Grown standards. Second generation winemaker Kirk Venge brings a 38-year Napa Valley winemaking legacy to B Cellars.

The new winery is expected to be completed in mid-2014. In the meantime, operations will continue at the current Silverado Trail location in Calistoga. Wines are available by visiting the Calistoga winery or online at bcellars.com.

Ranch

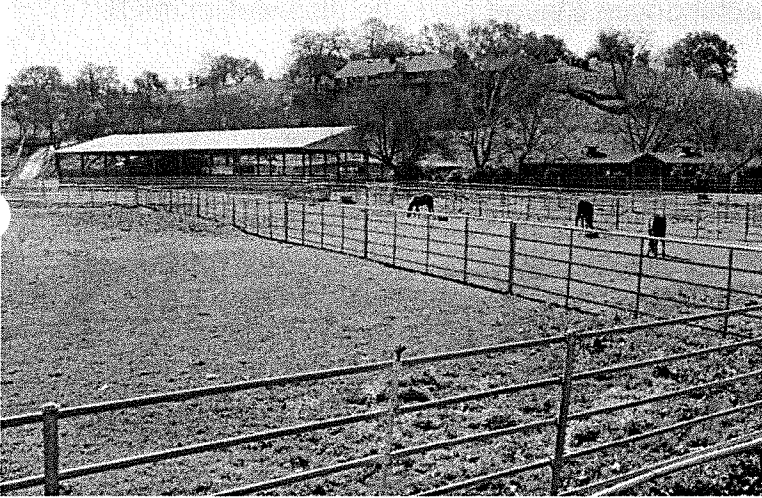
Winery planned for Oakville equestrian site PETER

ENSEN Feb 27, 2013



J.L. Sousa/Register

Horses at Vintage Oaks Ranch, which may be converted to a winery. J.L. Sousa/Register photos



J.L. Sousa/Register

Horse lovers are opposed to plans for a winery on the site of this horse ranch on Oakville Cross Road.

From Lissa Miller's house atop a hill on Oakville Cross Road, a 180-degree view of the heart of the Napa Valley stretches out, from the Vaca Mountains to Mount St. Helena — a distant lump on the horizon — to the Mayacamas, with swaths of vineyards everywhere in between.

"It's the only view like this in the valley," said Miller, who bought the property with her late husband, Clark, 23 years ago.

It's been a unique perch from which to witness the transformation of Napa Valley agriculture, from livestock, walnut trees and other crops decades ago, to almost entirely vineyards today.

"It's just gone from walnuts and livestock to wineries," said Miller, who breeds and raises horses on her 11.35-acre property.

That trend may inch forward next week. Miller has sold her property — and the view — to Calistoga-based B Cellars, which has plans to remove 19 walnut trees and put in a 45,000-gallon winery, a crush pad and caves for barrel storage.

B Cellars' application is going before the county Planning Commission next Wednesday, and co-founder Duffy Keys said he'd prefer not to discuss the company's plans until then.

"We've been working hard for the last several months complying with all the application processes," Keys said. "We're not here yet. I'd rather not get ahead of ourselves."

The property sits on the eastern portion of the Oakville American Viticultural Area, renowned for cabernet sauvignon, said Linda Neal of Tierra Roja, which is just east of Miller's property. Following in the footsteps of Robert Mondavi, Oakville grapegrowers and winemakers are a close-knit bunch, but Neal said she'd welcome B Cellars to the family.

"We're really right in the sweet spot," Neal said. "There's just a wonderful group of people here striving to make the best wines."

Oakville Winegrowers Association Executive Director Joyce Stavert said she also welcomes B Cellars.

"They've been in the business for awhile," Stavert said. "The more people that come to Oakville to make great wines, the better."

Miller said she grows less than two acres of cabernet grapes, plus some chardonnay, and has a permit for a 10,000 gallon winery that she never used.

B Cellars has purchased that permit, and is seeking to expand production and visitation from 10 people per day to 60, along with special marketing events, according to Napa County Planning Department documents.

While Miller said she'll have to be out by mid-October, she and her horses won't be going far — she's moving to a 17-acre property on Whitehall Lane near St. Helena.

"It's a big move for me," Miller said. "Everything goes with me — horses, dogs, cows, fencing, barns." She said she sold the property for financial reasons, but declined to name the sale price. She and her husband, Clark, bought it for \$287,000 a quarter century ago, but "it sold for a lot more than that," she said. Clark Miller, a former defensive end for the San Francisco 49ers and the founder of a successful beverage distributing company, died in 2008.

They first tried to purchase the property in 1967, when it was listed at \$42,000, but were unsuccessful, she said. After moving to Los Angeles because Clark Miller was playing for the Los Angeles Rams, Miller said they stayed in touch with owners.

"I was kind of determined," Miller said. "I said if you ever decide to sell, let me know."

The Millers have long raised and owned horses for cutting, a sport that gives riders two and a half minutes so they can separate two or three calves from a herd. She said her grandsons Jake and

Christopher Brennan — both Justin-Siena High School students — are ranked as among the top performers in the West.

Her granddaughters, Makenna and Maya Miller, also ride horses, she said.

Miller said the decision to sell was “very sad” but moving to Whitehall puts her closer to her former residence on Zinfandel Lane.

“I’m almost making a full circle,” Miller said. “I really do like it here. You could be doing worse things.”

B Cellars gets approval from commission for move to Oakville

PETER JENSEN Mar 7, 2013

The Napa County Planning Commission helped a carousel of Napa Valley property transactions and developments continue spinning Wednesday, as it approved plans for a new 45,000-gallon winery on Oakville Cross Road for Calistoga-based B Cellars.

B Cellars is leaving its current location in the Silver Rose Inn resort, whose owners' redevelopment plans are forcing the winery out. Silver Rose initially won approval of those plans from the Calistoga City Council last year, and later from voters when they approved Measure B in the November election.

B Cellars will take over the Oakville Cross Road property, which was formerly owned by Lissa Miller. Miller raised horses with her late husband, Clark, for more than 20 years at the property, which sits in the 700 block of Oakville Cross and boasts a 180-degree view of the heart of the Napa Valley. She's sold it and will move — along with her horses — to Whitehall Lane near St. Helena. An investor in B Cellars purchased the property through a single asset limited liability corporation, co-founder Duffy Keys said Thursday.

B Cellars' application expands a winery use-permit for a 10,000-gallon winery the Millers had rights to but never built. Planning commissioners unanimously approved the request. Commissioner Bob Fiddaman praised the project as making good use of a prime location in Napa Valley.

"If you look at the neighbors you realize you're in one of the sweet spots in the Napa Valley," Fiddaman said.

B Cellars will be putting in caves for wine storage, a crushpad, a winery and potentially new vineyard plantings. The Millers planted several acres of cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay. Nineteen walnut trees will be removed during construction, but the company plans to re-plant six new trees for every one removed.

The new winery will have visitation capped at 250 people per week, plus special events. Keys said that the move to Oakville will help his company contribute to an area renowned for cabernet sauvignon. He couldn't put a timeline on when the move will take place; Miller said last week she has to move by October.

"It's an exciting opportunity for us to be situated in the epicenter of what helps to define Napa Valley cabernet," Keys said.

He said the company began formulating plans for the move in early 2012, coinciding with Silver Rose's redevelopment plans. The uncertainty swirling around Silver Rose and the campaigns for

Measure B was difficult, Keys said, but after learning the Miller property was for sale the company jumped at the chance to relocate, he said.

"We worked pretty hard to see that come to fruition," Keys said. "It's unsettling for a business as well, not having certainty. In today's business world you need alternatives to the alternatives."

Keys said the goal is to create a smaller winery that will focus on one-on-one contact with customers, relying in part on their past experiences with B Cellars.

"Our intent is to build a little jewel box of a winery, and a hospitality experience that is very comfortable, using one-on-one service as a hallmark," Keys said. "The wines, we believe, will stand on their own merits."

Neighbor Launce Gamble and Oakville Grade resident Gary Margadant spoke at Wednesday's hearing and expressed concerns for how a new winery on Oakville Cross would impact traffic on the road, and its intersections with Silverado Trail and Highway 29.

Margadant uses the intersection of Oakville Grade and Highway 29 frequently, and said it presents a dangerous left-turn for drivers. Putting more drivers, especially those driving after consuming alcohol, into the nearby intersection of Oakville Cross and Highway 29 could be dangerous, he said.

"That corner is a concern to me," Margadant said.

Jeffrey Redding, a consultant for the project, told the commissioners that B Cellars' intent is to draw visitors from the existing network of nearby wineries in the eastern portion of the Oakville American Viticultural Area, which wouldn't necessarily put more drivers on the roads.

Redding said the company wanted to avoid putting in a left-turn lane on Oakville Cross in front of the property, as that — and a sign advertising a winery — would draw in more casual tourists and create more traffic.

"We want to blend in," Redding said. "We're tucked in and we intend to be low-profile. The trips that are coming to our winery are diverted trips. We happen to have an excellent address in the Napa Valley."

After compliance with the Winery Definition Ordinance attracted public debate among wine industry groups last month, Redding said B Cellars will comply with the ordinance's 75-percent rule, as it uses 85 percent Napa Valley grapes currently.

Fiddaman proposed to lower the weekly maximum visitation from 420 people per week to 250 people as a means of reducing the winery's impacts. His fellow commissioners agreed to that.

Daniel Bucko of the San Francisco-based architecture and design firm Hart Howerton said the winery will use designs similar to Spanish Missions, a classic look that he believes will still fit in the Napa Valley far into the future.

"Fads — well, they're fun," Bucko said. "But the overall fabric is something this project will contribute to for 150 to 200 years."

B Cellars

B Cellars new Oakville location almost ready

ANNE WARD ERNST Jan 22, 2014



B Cellars hospitality center will feature an open concept living room/kitchen tasting room. The kitchen will host small cooking classes and demonstrations.

Come spring B Cellars will begin planting a new vineyard in Oakville and in the summer it will vacate its Calistoga location and move into the new winery on Oakville Cross Road.

“We are well under way with construction,” said Duffy Keys, co-founder and principal. “We are about 70 percent complete on the cave excavation. We are targeting mid-June of this year to be operational.”

In addition to the existing vines there, B Cellars is adding about six acres of vineyard and will end up with seven to eight of the almost 12 acres planted to predominantly cabernet sauvignon, some cabernet franc and possibly some merlot, Keys said. Continuing to oversee the winemaking is Kirk Venge.

The new location includes a hospitality house that will bring to fruition the vision B Cellars planned for all along, Keys said.

“The intent for B Cellars has always been to present our wines in a food-centric manner,” he said. The uncertainty of the winery’s current location on the Silver Rose property, along with permitting complications, prohibited B Cellars from accomplishing its food and wine pairings dream.

The look and feel of the project will blend in with the other wineries and buildings on Oakville Cross Road; agrarian with a contemporary twist. The exterior will include rippled steel with a finish made to

look like rust, so that the building looks like it's been there. There will be "a fair bit of glass" and a corner of the winemaking facility that reveals the wine tanks inside.

"We want to give people a chance to see what goes on behind closed doors," he said.

The hospitality house will include a demonstration kitchen where "B Bites" of amuse bouche and flatbreads will be prepared to complement the wines being poured that day. The open-concept room is intended to be relaxing, encouraging guests to linger.

The room will have a living room/kitchen environment because, as Keys said, "Where do we always end up when we go into somebody's home? The kitchen."

The demonstration kitchen will give them a chance to do small cooking classes and to be spontaneous in food service. They want to involve guests in "things that we're preparing. It will be a very interactive experience," he said.

The bites will be seasonal, "a combination of items from our garden, from our orchard and from our food purveyors of the community; very much farm-to-table," Keys said.

An example might be a plank roasted coho salmon bite with a sip of sangiovese or pinot noir, or whatever they might be pouring. Overseeing the kitchen operation will be Christina Machamer, as the culinary and wine program manager. Machamer gained the attention of the culinary world during her stint on the fourth season of "Hell's Kitchen."

Her prize was a job as senior sous chef at Gordon Ramsay's new London West Hollywood restaurant.

"She has a terrific personality. She's not only comfortable in the kitchen, but also comfortable in the front with customers," Keys said.

B Cellars will be open by appointment, so the winery will craft in advance the guests' experience, which will start at \$40 per person. They will be met by a winery host and they may start out in the market garden, stroll the stone fruit orchard, tour the caves and taste some barrel wines. During the walk around the property the host may talk about the seasons, soil, wine, make a stop in the vegetable garden and visit the chickens before heading back to the hospitality center. There will be no rushing, no hurried sip-and-go treatment.

"Our concept is what I refer to as a 'destination winery'. You don't have to get everything in a single visit; you will want to come back. You might want to come back bring friends do a private tasting room," he said.

The tasting room in Calistoga is limited in space and doesn't offer the grander experience, though it was something Keys said he dearly wanted.

"We had our heart set on that ... everything that was being planned for the (Calistoga) location," Keys said adding that "the community, everything about what Calistoga offered" was what the group was looking for.

But as luck would have it, the winery's future was at the old Vintage Oaks Ranch, a horse ranch that raised champion-caliber horses and had once been a dairy farm and other agricultural operations, with the first recorded deed dating back to 1875.

