Spirits and saints

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The Rev. Dominic Roscioli holds a bottle of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Riesling, one of three wines (for starters) he hopes will reintroduce people to the saints and help fund a favorite charity organization. (KENOSHA NEWS PHOTO BY BILL SIEL)

Kenosha group hopes Holy Spirits Wine helps people reconnect with Catholic roots

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When Dominic Roscioli was a boy growing up in Kenosha it seemed like everybody's house was a shrine.

"You were never alone," said Roscioli, who is now the Rev. Dominic Roscioli. "Everywhere you looked there was a saint looking back at you."

That's not necessarily the case anymore.

"When people moved on to the next generation from the old immigrant neighborhoods, some of the saints got left behind," Roscioli said.

Along with partners Jody Becker and Carlo Pedone — "We're all Columbus Park kids," Roscioli said — Holy Spirits Wine is an effort to renew that connection. The trio's wines, which now are on sale in stores and are being poured in restaurants around southeastern Wisconsin, feature saints matched with wine varietals.

"I was looking for a way to bring the saints marching back into peoples' homes," Roscioli said. "What I find is there are a lot of people who don't go to church so much, but they're very spiritual. It's a way to get people to reconnect with their Catholic roots."

Like his father and grandfather, Roscioli has long made wine at home. He also has developed ties to one of the most visible charitable companies around, the late Paul Newman's Newman's Own, while Roscioli volunteered his time at Newman's Hole in the Wall camp for children with life-threatening illnesses.

"We've set up a for-profit company with a non-profit mission, basically like Newman's Own," Roscioli said.

That non-profit mission is both to bring the saints back into people's lives and to provide financial support to Next Step, an organization founded by former Wisconsinite Bill Kubicek that picks up with kids after they age out of Hole in the Wall. A certain percentage of the profits go to Next Step, and the rest go back into growing the company.

Holy Spirits Wine — which is produced by Windsor Wineries in California — now includes three varieties, each of which sports a label with a first-person story.

Mary — as in Jesus' mother Mary — appears on the Riesling, combining some autobiographical information with the idea that she chose a Reisling because the sweet wine matches the "sweet bouquet of mysteries whispered to me by God's angels."

Then there's St. Rocco.

"Take Rocco. Saint Rocco is restless. He gives away his fortune, and he's unsure what to do with his life, and he's on this pilgrimage," Roscioli said. "But the journey became the destination. He started taking care of people who had the plague, he got plague himself.

"He had kind of a restless spirit, but he found himself in helping others. It soothed his soul."

And thus, as Rocco tells it himself on the label, he chose "a full-bodied, soothing-to-the-soul cabernet sauvignon which best reflects my story."

St. Nick, paired with merlot, rounds out the original three saints. But, with half the original run — more than 1,300 bottles — already gone in little more than a couple months, Holy Spirits has plans for three more saints in the spring of 2009 and another three in the summer. There's also the opportunity to offer wine at parish festivals that matches the parish's namesake, splitting the proceeds with churches and adding another layer of charity.

"I'd like to do juice boxes, too, for kids, with the same concept," he said. "And maybe even collectible cards. I was big on baseball cards when I was a kid. It could be an excellent teaching method for Catholic schools."

As long as the message comes across.

"It's inspirational," Rosciloi said. "The saints are ordinary people who did extraordinary things when they responded to God. That's what you want people to take away from this. That's why the messages on the bottles are in the first person."