

Boynton's Feathertop Winery, Porepunkah

Janelle Boynton, co-proprietor

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Boynton's Feathertop Winery on The Great Alpine Road in Victoria's north-east rates among the world's most stunningly located wineries. Situated in the lush Ovens Valley and close to Victoria's ski fields, you could be forgiven for thinking that it's the plaything of a Collins Street medico or King Street lawyer.

However, Boyntons is a down-to-earth small business that during the past 20 years has over come debt, drought, frost and bushfire to keep afloat.

When St-Kilda architect Janelle Boynton married into the family in 2000, and subsequently took a hefty financial stake in the business, she not only brought new commercial acumen, but also a firm belief that a business needs to connect widely with others in the sector.

Despite her transformation from urban-chic architect to a mother of two young children with a hands-on role in the business, she still finds time to head-up the region's dynamic food and wine industry marketing body, North East Valleys Food and Wine, and to sit on the Victorian Ministerial Food and Wine Tourism Committee. Partner in business, wine maker and husband, Kel Boynton, is an active member of the local vignerons association and a delegate to the Victorian Wine Industry Association.

"Kel and I realised a couple of years back that we were fortunate in what we have and we felt that we had some responsibility to help others in the industry.

"We took the big step to employ other staff, so that we could contribute to the bigger picture, except that our 'bigger' picture is actually the smaller producers and wineries of the region.

"I was approached to help restructure North East Valleys Food and Wine, specifically to make it a more industry-driven body, one that requires industry players to contribute to the growth of their own industry.

After all, it's their income and jobs at stake, so while local council involvement is always welcome, the group must be industry-led, if it is to stand on its own feet over the longer term".



North East Valleys Food and Wine Group started in the 1990s and although it currently has 150 members, it has a potential membership base of nearly 400 businesses, spread over three municipalities and five winery G.I. regions.

With food and wine worth about \$180 million each year and with the region boasting the highest density of 'chef's hats' restaurants in Victoria, it's not hard to see why the three councils nominate food and wine as their number 1 tourism strength.

Janelle says that the major challenge is overcoming the industry's insularity.

"When I left big business to start my own in Melbourne, I immediately missed having a mentor to gain ideas from, or just someone sitting next to me to bounce ideas off. A good network can provide that.

"When I moved here I could have continued my voluntary work in health, but I read an article about the late Patricia Brown of Milawa and of the work she did to bind together the local community and her industry. I realised that there's a chronic shortage of people like her now playing that role in the wine industry.

"Primary producers used to be the wealthiest people in any country area, but times are much tougher now and people are much busier, so a network to provide social and professional support is more important than ever. My motto has always been that 'networking is free'.



PARTICIPATION GETTING INVOLVED



TOURISM
EXCELLENCE

It's about getting people together and it doesn't cost anything to do that".

However, Janelle also warns of the burn-out potential among people who heavily contribute to their wider community and of the need to retain a healthy work-life balance

"You need to watch the balance between what you do and your work, finances, family, relationships and recreational activities. It costs me significant income to be as involved as I am, so I don't go into things lightly. You also need to set a firm timeframe, so that you don't get burnt-out and so that others can step-up to the mark to take their turn."

