



Weekly Business Showcase

8/29/2016 – 9/02/2016

Heart of the Desert Pistachios & Wines

7288 Hwy 54/70

(575) 434-0035

Alamogordo Chamber Member Since: 1985



Owners

Eagle Ranch Pistachio Groves and Heart of the Desert Vineyards are owned and operated by George and Marianne Schweers.

The Beginning

George, an Air Force officer stationed at Holloman AFB in 1969, had been raised in rural Nebraska. A longtime family goal was to return to the field of agriculture after military service. So, in the early 1970's, after the family determined that they wanted to stay in the Tularosa Basin, the search for a crop that would grow in desert conditions began. While the Schweers were researching, they received a phone call from Harvey Widner, employed by a contractor at Holloman AFB, who had heard of the Schweers' project via the "Holloman Wireless." Harvey had also studied desert crops and had planted 400 seedling pistachio trees. When the contractor left Holloman in 1974, Harvey offered to sell his 400 two-year-old trees to the Schweers, and a family farm was born! Little did they know what was in store!

The Early Years

For the first five years, George and Marianne and their three children, Gordon, Laura, and Jean worked the farm. After work, after school, and weekends, their days were filled with farming - all done by hand. The first expansion of the groves took place with the planting of 700 trees. This was done with the help of the local high school baseball team. Gordon was on the team and they were always looking for a fundraiser. Each subsequent expansion brought its own set of challenges. Being the only grove in New Mexico, there was no support industry in place for harvesting or processing. Necessity truly being the mother of invention, the Schweers had to develop their own processing operation, or truck the nuts out of state for processing. Fabricating equipment, buying used equipment, and trucking the nuts for salting and roasting, were all ongoing projects in the early years.

Today

Eagle Ranch is the home of New Mexico's first and largest producing pistachio groves. The farm consists of 105 acres of pistachio groves with approximately 13,000 trees. Daily field care, harvesting, processing, and marketing the finished product all take place on site at Eagle Ranch.

The family added "Heart of the Desert" wines to their product line in 2002. A vineyard of 12,000 vines was planted in 2003, adding to the diversity of the farm. The yield of their first crop was encouraging and prompted the addition of another 6,000 vines, planted in 2005, and another 6,000 vines, planted in 2011. The vineyard currently has 24,000 vines. The seven different varieties of grapes vines harvested each year are Chardonnay, Cabernet, Zinfandel, Shiraz, Riesling, Malvasia Bianca, and Gewürztraminer, making the production of a wide range of wines possible.

Services & Products Offered

Heart of the Desert is the trademarked brand name for products produced and sold by Eagle Ranch. Eagle Ranch produces farm fresh pistachios and wine grapes, and offers many items and services to the residents of the Tularosa Basin, as well as visitors. The Heart of the Desert gift store offers a large variety of pistachios, several pistachio candies, ice cream, and coffee. It carries a large variety of gift items to include jewelry, wall art, accessories, New Mexico gourmet snacks and sundries. Heart of the Desert also includes a winery that offers free wine tastings and a wine club. A Tuscan themed patio is available for private events and hosts several public events per month. It is available during regular business hours for enjoying a glass of wine, cup of coffee or some pistachio white chocolate ice cream. Farm tours are available Monday – Friday; June – August: twice daily at 10:00 AM and 1:30 PM, September - May: at 1:30 PM. Group tours of 10 or more are also available by appointment. Heart of the Desert also offers a large selection of gift baskets with shipping options which may either be purchased in-store or on-line at www.heartofthedesert.com. Many corporate gift options are also available, as well as gift certificates.

Get and Stay In Touch

For more information and to purchase products visit the webpage at www.heartofthedesert.com. You may also sign-up to receive email specials, the monthly newsletter and annual catalog on the website. Heart of the Desert also keeps an active Facebook page that will keep you up to date on special events, www.facebook.com/NewMexicoPistachios.