

# Newberg-based catering company on the rise

**Dining — Rogue Gourmet catering company has grown significantly since it was formed as an offshoot of Subterra – A Wine Cellar Restaurant**

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Martin and Janet Bleck, owners of Subterra — A Wine Cellar Restaurant, were no strangers to the catering industry when they started the Rogue Gourmet Catering Company a few years ago.

But they quickly learned there are some subtle differences between catering in Miami, Fla., — where they were previously based — and Yamhill County. “Here, it’s more about celebrating food, family, dancing and good wine,” Janet Bleck said. “In Miami, it’s more about who can throw the best party and spend the most money.” Her husband agreed. “Here, people actually come out to help you unload the van,” said Martin Bleck, who also serves as Subterra’s executive chef. “In Miami, you’re treated more like you’re the help.”

The couple’s company in Florida, Creative Taste, a fine-dining caterer, was huge. Janet Bleck said that the year before they sold the operation, it did more than \$2.5 million in sales, put on more than 450 events and managed more than 70 employees. All of that took its toll, however, and eventually sparked their relocation to the Chehalem Valley. “We just got burned out,” she said.

None of this is to say that Creative Tastes isn’t a big part of the couple’s story. In fact, it’s how they met. When a young Martin Bleck, fresh out of the University of Miami, was trying to break into the food industry, he was interviewed by Janet to be a part-time prep cook. He was Janet Bleck’s second choice. But he got the job when the first guy failed to show up for work. And the rest, as they say, is history. Still, even after they started Subterra, they had no desire to get back into catering. According to Janet Bleck, it arose organically. “The catering just came naturally,” she said. “And we realized how much more fun it is out here.”

It may have started small, but it's grown quickly. Rogue Gourmet is now the exclusive caterer for the McMinnville Community Center (which includes at least three events a week, year-round) and Chehalem Glenn Golf Course (about 40 events per year). Rogue has also set up a tent at every Tunes on Tuesday concert for the past few years and will continue the tradition this season. Wedding receptions and other private events, many of them in partnership with the area's wine industry, keep them busy as well.

A few months ago, the Blecks opened office space above Subterra dedicated to Rogue Gourmet. Part of the motivation was to give Janet Bleck a desk that wasn't in the prep kitchen of a bustling restaurant. "It was hard," she said with a laugh. "Here I am, trying to converse with clients, negotiate contracts and discuss menus, and I have a very busy restaurant swirling around me." But the Blecks also want to draw clear distinctions between the two businesses. "We don't want to mix our markets up. For Rogue, we can do everything from barbecue all the way up to what we do at Subterra," he said. "But Subterra is a fine-dining establishment. If we go out and grill hamburgers as Subterra, people are going to scratch their heads."

Rogue has a handful of dedicated employees, and a roster of about a dozen who are called in for events on an as-needed basis. According to Janet Bleck, her and her husband's roles with the catering company are simple. "I book it; he cooks it," she said. For more information, call 503-915-8810, visit [www.roguegourmet.com](http://www.roguegourmet.com).