

# Burgundy Winemakers Mark Feast of St. Vincent

GREG KELLER, Associated Press

SAINT-AUBIN, France (AP) — Oenophiles from across France on Saturday gathered in this tiny Burgundian village amid pre-dawn darkness to celebrate St. Vincent, the patron saint of winemakers.

In a ceremony with roots in the Middle Ages, several hundred winemakers from villages across Burgundy, some wearing bright red robes, formed an early morning procession carrying antique wooden statues of their patron saint through the vineyards in an annual rite known as the St. Vincent Tournante.

Up to 40,000 people were expected for the two-day festival, which takes place in a different Burgundian village each year. Following the vineyard procession and a Mass, local winemakers throw open their cellar doors for tastings of their chardonnays and pinot noirs. Organizers say 15,000 bottles of wine will be opened during the weekend.

Saint-Aubin is a village of 250 people on a hillside south of Beaune, the center of the Burgundy wine region. Nearby are villages with famous names where some of the most sought-after wines in the world are made: Puligny-Montrachet, Pommard, Meursault.

The tradition of celebrating Saint Vincent here dates back to the Middle Ages, but by the early 20th century it had largely died out. Local winemakers brought it back in 1938, and have since turned the annual party into a clever way to draw attention to their wines.

Planning the event is a major undertaking for the small villages that volunteer to host it, said local winemaker Christian Roux, the head of this year's organizing committee.

Planning started three years ago, and in recent weeks all of Saint-Aubin's 250 inhabitants as well as several hundred from neighboring villages have mobilized to prepare for hosting the 20,000-40,000 people expected to come over the weekend, Roux said.

"We saw it was a good way to promote a whole generation of young, talented winemakers here," Roux said.

**Source URL (retrieved on 01/27/2015 - 2:51pm):**

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