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Glacé: Another reason to drink wine-1C

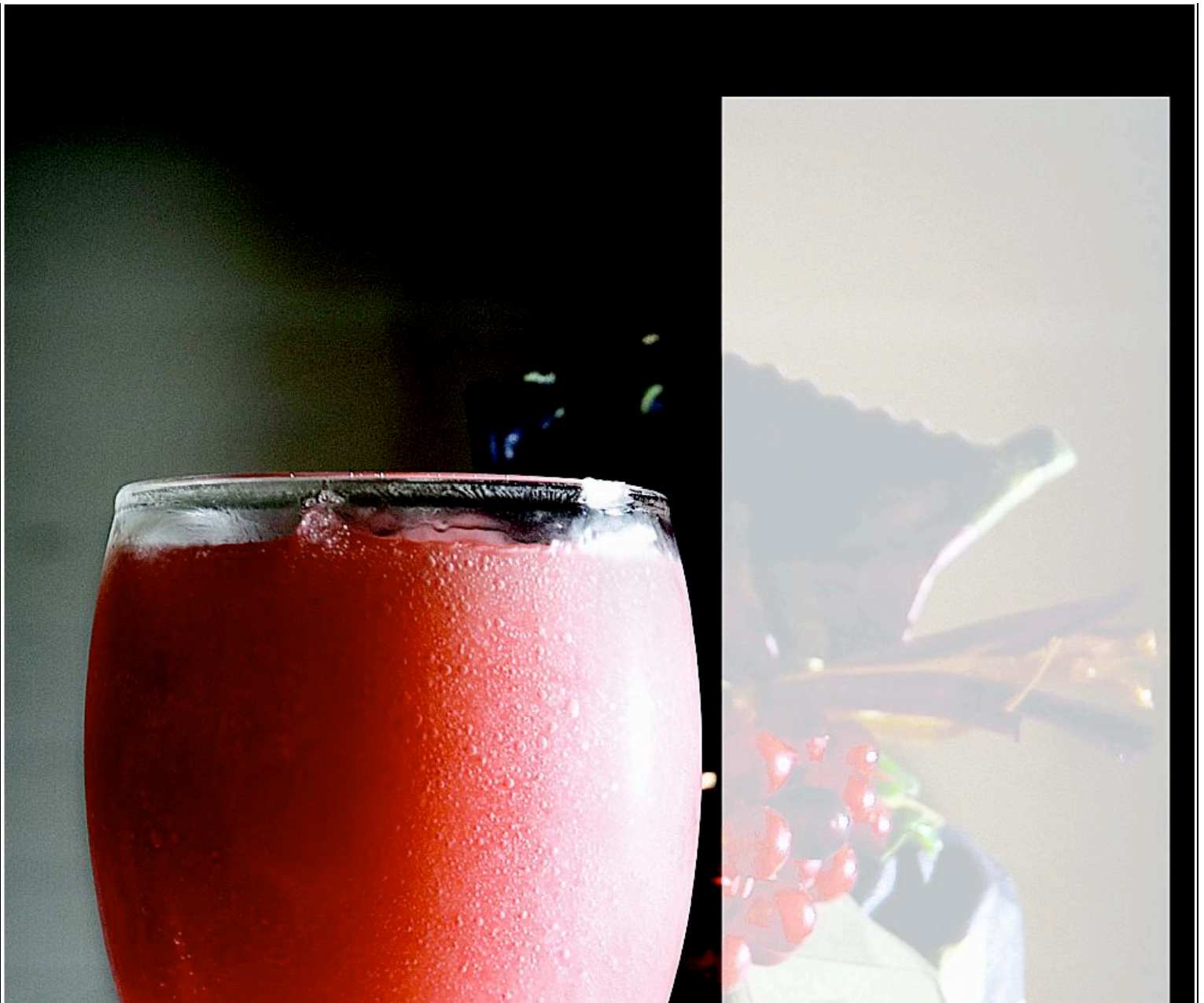
By Ashley Gardner Texarkana Gazette

The Jimmy Buffet song doesn't say a thing about Wine-a-Rita-ville, but that didn't stop two local women from creating a tasty wine drink in the likeness of a margarita. Wine Glacé, or wine-a-rita, is a powder mixture which calls for wine as the base liquor for a delicious frozen drink. The product is the brainchild of business partners Judy Smith and Donna Griffin, who wanted a more refreshing way to drink wine. "In 2004, we had an idea for a frozen wine drink. Neither of us are wine drinkers and we thought maybe if it was frozen, we could probably drink it," Smith said. Instead of sitting on the idea and waiting for someone else to steal their thunder, the women decided to take action. "We really lucked into it because my brother was working at a place that manufacturers drink mixes," Griffin said. It took a couple of mixings and a couple of tastings before Griffin and Smith were satisfied with their product. When blended with one's wine of choice and ice it makes a frothy, tangy mixture with a unique taste. The pair first introduced their Wine Glacé in November of 2004 at the Junior League Mistletoe Fair in Texarkana. "The first production was about 100 bags. We went to pick it up in the car," Smith said with a laugh. Wine-a-rita was well received that night and the women knew they were onto something. Not only does it taste good, it's pretty too. The pair dressed up the plain white pouches of powder by packaging it in dark material printed with grapes and raffia tied around the top with a cluster of grapes. "It's kind of funny. We cut and sewed the bags when we were trying to come up with the packaging. Then the material we used was discontinued. But it went over so well, we thought we have to do this," Griffin said. Now they have the material custom printed. The bags are sewn here locally at Opportunities Inc., something that makes the women proud. Opportunities gives people with disabilities an avenue to learn a trade and make some money. "They cut and sew all our bags. We're excited to have someone local sew the bags. Everything is done by hand. It's very labor intensive," Smith said. Neither Griffin or Smith really knew how successful their little venture would be. Within the first year the business was profitable. At this time, Wine Glacé is sold in more than 800 retail locations with new customers coming in everyday. Locally, wine-a-rita is sold at Juli's Deli and Fan Fare. The recommended retail price is \$12 per package. "It's a no frills operation. We try to keep our cost down as much as possible," Smith said. Wine-a-rita can be mixed with any type of wine. One package will make about two blenders full of drinks. "We're not trying to imitate a margarita. It's truly a frozen wine drink that takes on the flavor of the wine," Smith said. On average they ship out on 500 packages a day. They have had orders as big as 5,000 units and they say their biggest customers are wineries. "We didn't know what wineries would think about our product ... but wineries have ended up being our largest customer," Smith said. Smith and Griffin, who've been business partners for the better part of 15 years, met when their daughters were in preschool together. Their first business venture was the Bunnyhop, a children's clothing store in Summerhill Square, which they sold after one year. Their second business venture they took a turn making children's jewelry. "We did that for 10 years and we just sold it last year," Smith said. Next they moved onto developing the frozen wine drink. At first they ran the business out of Griffin's house but as the business grew they needed more space. That's when they moved into a unit at Texarkana National Storage. Currently the business occupies three rooms at the storage complex. They employ eight parttime employees, all friends of Griffin and Smith. The two friends say they've been so successful in their business ventures because their backgrounds and personalities mesh well. "We complement each other. My degree is in marketing with a background in retail. Donna has a degree in accounting," Smith said. Griffin and Smith are working hard to expand the current market for Wine Glacé by showcasing their product all over the country. "We're just trying to get it in more areas. Our whole push is in trying to reach retail markets," Smith said. They recently released a sugar-free version of Wine Glacé and the women say they will eventually add to their product line. "All of our customers always ask ... if we have anything else to introduce. We are testing other stuff, but right now we're so busy. It will possibly be next year," Griffin said. Wine Glacé and the dynamic duo from Texarkana have received national attention in publications such as Best in Texas and Las Vegas Life. "It's been really exciting to have the product recognition," Smith said. Smith and Griffin are a perfect example of two people following through with an idea and creating a niche for themselves AND making a profit. Their advice for others who dream of giving birth to a fabulous new idea—just go for it or somebody else will. Now that's a philosophy we can drink to.





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Photos by Evan Lewis