

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**WINEMAKERS JUDGE THEIR PEERS FOR CUVÉE AND
CELEBRATE TWENTY YEARS OF THE “OSCAR” OF THE
ONTARIO WINE INDUSTRY**

St. Catharines, ON, January 28, 2008 – In anticipation of the Cuvée Awards, recognized as the “Oscars” of the Ontario wine industry, 44 winemakers gathered together for an intense day of blind tasting to select this year’s winning wines. The winners remain a closely guarded secret until they are announced at the 20th Anniversary Cuvée Gala, to be held Friday, February 29th at the Niagara Fallsview Casino Resort.

The Cuvée Awards are unique in that they are the only awards in Canada where the winning wines are chosen by the winemakers themselves. Fifty-seven Ontario wineries submitted 190 white, red and sweet wines for a variety of awards including Best Sweet Wine, Best Red and White Wine and Best LCBO General List Red and White Wine. All wines were also rated to ensure that they met the Cuvée Standard of Excellence and therefore merit pouring at the Cuvée Gala.

This year’s judging was also special in that it marks the 20th Anniversary of Cuvée. Brian Schmidt, winemaker at Vineland Estates Winery, was one of the many winemakers participating in the judging who has been involved throughout the 20 year history of the event. “The wines submitted for the 2008 Cuvée judging in particular were outstanding, making it both rewarding and challenging to select the final award winners. The sheer number and the calibre of wines we tasted this year highlights the positive evolution in Ontario wines over the last two decades.”

This assessment was echoed by respected wine writer Tony Aspler, who attended the judging as a member of the Independent Review Panel. The job of this panel, made up of prominent wine tasting professionals, is to reevaluate wines that the winemakers feel are potentially deficient. “Our job this year was very easy, with almost all wines making the grade,” said Aspler. “The field was a real testament to the quality of winemaking in Ontario today.”

The Cuvée Weekend event is open to the public and includes the Cuvée Gala and Awards at Niagara Fallsview Casino Resort, and the Cuvée En Route passport program. Cuvée Weekend tickets are \$200.00 per person and include admission to the Cuvée Gala and all Cuvée En Route activities.

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They are available on www.cuvee.ca or by calling 905-684-8688. Cuvée En Route admission can be purchased separately for \$30.00 per person, via the same outlets or by visiting one of the participating wineries on Cuvée Weekend. Proceeds from the weekend go to the Niagara Community Foundation and are used in its work with community groups across the region.

Ticket and event information, details about each winery's Cuvée En Route tastings, overnight accommodation information, and announcements about participating wineries and chefs can all be found on the Cuvée web site, www.cuvee.ca.

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CUVÉE 20th ANNIVERSARY – BACKGROUND

It All Started With Chardonnay

The idea of Cuvée was born while sitting around the kitchen table of local Niagara dentist Dr. David Bergen's Port Dalhousie home while sipping International Chardonnays. It was a tasting organized by the Port Dalhousie Underground, a Niagara Peninsula wine group. The theme was Great International Chardonnays, but, by way of interest a number of local winemakers were encouraged to submit their own Chardonnays as well. The wines were tasted blind. When the wines were revealed, the best wines of the night were - to everyone's surprise - not the international wines, but, in fact, several locally made Niagara wines. The realization that the "new" Ontario wine industry could compete with the rest of the world suggested that the idea of an event like Cuvée could really work.

For the Love of Wine

That fall, Ken Douglas, a lawyer and now a winemaker at 13th Street Winery, suggested to Bergen that Grey Gables School might want to organize a wine tasting as a fundraiser. Bergen introduced the concept to Kathleen Miller, Grey Gables' headmistress and to Peter Gamble, a friend and wine enthusiast. They met in December of 1988. The idea made sense. A committee was formed and held its first meeting in January of 1989. Among the members of that first committee were Debi Pratt from Inniskillin, Angelo Pavan, winemaker at Cave Spring and Carol Marotta, development director at Grey Gables. After two more meetings and much thought and work, the first Cuvée was held on the first Friday of March. An evening of veal boulettes, venison tourtiere, pheasant galantine and smoked Canadian fish all paired with the finest Ontario wines cost \$35 per ticket. Wineries eagerly participated in the event and proudly showcased their best VQA wines in the vintner-judged competition under the categories of white, red and sweet wines. Cuvée was unlike any other wine competition because it centered on the wine being judged by the winemaker and his or her peers. It was a successful event that benefited Grey Gables School, local restaurants and the wine industry alike.

A Red Carpet Wine and Food Celebration Continues

As Cuvée progressed through the years, venues changed, wineries changed and new restaurants contributed to the repeated success of this highly respected fundraising extravaganza. The emphasis of the event was as much about the food as it was about the wine; local restaurants eagerly participated for prestigious awards and titles. Winery participation soared from the original 16 wineries to 57 wineries in 2008. In 2004, the Niagara Community Foundation took over the responsibility of Cuvée keeping alive the tradition of celebrating local wine and cuisine and raising funds to support the community.

The event has expanded to become known as Cuvée Weekend, encompassing a number of activities that wine enthusiasts look forward to attending every March. Today, the Cuvée Gala continues at the Fallsview Casino resort and attracts over 800 attendees, while participants enjoy themed Cuvée En Route tastings throughout the weekend at participating wineries. Cuvée award winning wines are eagerly sought after by consumers, and the awards themselves have become known as the "Oscars" of the Ontario wine industry.

This year we celebrate Cuvée's 20th anniversary, an event that helped shape the Ontario wine industry by igniting awareness and stimulating appreciation for local food and wine. The Gala will mark the contributions of many who have made Cuvée a success over the 20 years through images and memorabilia while participants raise a glass to 20 years of excellence in Canadian wine making.

Cuvée Milestones

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| 1989 | Victoria Park Restaurant hosted the first Cuvée. Approximately 350 guests attend and 16 wineries participate. |
| 1990 | Cuvée En Route begins. First Expert's Tasting is organized. |
| 1991 | <i>Addition of General List Wine Awards</i> |
| 1993 | Gerald Asher, Wine Writer appointed Honorary Chairman. |
| 1994 | Skyline Brock Hotel hosts Cuvée with Executive Chef Michael Stadlander. |
| 1995 | Queen's Landing Restaurant hosts Cuvée. <i>Addition of Sparkling and Dessert Wine Awards.</i> Six chefs contribute to the Cuvée feast. |
| 1998 | Cuvée's 10 th Anniversary |
| 2000 | <i>Addition of Limited Edition Red and White Wine Awards.</i> |
| 2001 | <i>Addition of Cuvée Awards of Distinction for restaurants with the best representation of Ontario wines on their wine lists.</i> |
| 2003 | White Oaks hosts Cuvée. |
| 2004 | Niagara Community Foundation takes over the planning and production of Cuvée. |
| 2005 | <i>Addition of the Gold Awards.</i> |
| 2006 | His Excellency Jean-Daniel Lafond named Honorary Patron of Cuvée. |
| 2007 | Fallsview Casino Resort becomes hosting sponsor of Cuvée. |
| 2008 | Cuvée's 20 th Anniversary. 57 wineries participate in Cuvée and over 800 expected to attend Gala. |