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## **WASHINGTON WINEGROWERS HONORS INDUSTRY LEADERS**

[Kennewick, WA] - The Washington Winegrowers Association (Winegrowers) recognized four industry leaders in early March for their achievements during the annual Convention & Trade Show in Kennewick. Dave Minick, Willow Crest, was honored as the Erick Hanson Memorial Grower of the Year, Kent Waliser, Sagemoor, received the Industry Service award, Mike Sauer, Red Willow, received the Lifetime Achievement honor and Gordy Hill, Coventry Vale, was awarded the Grand Vin.

### **GROWER OF THE YEAR –**

**David Minick**, owner and founding winemaker of Willow Crest Wine Estates and recently retired vineyard director for Precept Wine, Willow Crest's partner company, received the Erick Hanson Memorial Winegrape Grower of the Year Award for demonstrated viticultural skills that provide impact in the vineyard and in the bottle. He started in the industry working vineyards on the family farm in the Yakima Valley. In the 1980s, he took grape growing to the next level by making handcrafted wine from select blocks of the family vineyard. He continued growing and selling winegrapes to local wineries until he launched his own winery and label: Willow Crest Wine Estates. Minick has built a trusted reputation as an industry expert, a studied and respected source for viticultural expertise, and is a well-known role model for the incoming generation of Washington wine leaders.

"In true recognition of Dave's accomplishments, what stands out the most is his vision and determination at such a young age to create a brand and pioneer new varieties such as Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre', and Pinot gris. His timing was perfect for the trending growth in the market," shared Jim McFerran, director of viticulture for Wyckoff Farms.

### **INDUSTRY SERVICE –**

**Kent Waliser**, general manager of Sagemoor Vineyards in Pasco, received the Industry Service Award for a lifetime of service impacting the grape and wine industry. Waliser comes from a long line of growers in Milton-Freewater. After leaving the apple industry, Waliser started in the wine industry in the early 2000's. He arrived at Sagemoor assuming all operations during a trying time for the wine industry, managing five vineyards including the famous Bacchus and Dionysus vineyards, ultimately becoming the general manager. He is focused on customer service and relationships with winemakers. He championed getting grape data onto a website, allowing winemakers to use historical data to inform decision-making. Waliser has had a vision for the Washington wine industry and spent his career working on pillars of education, research, and collaboration. He is credited with donating time and viticultural expertise as well as fruit every year to many community college enology programs. He has served numerous years on the Washington Wine Commission board, spent countless hours on various committees to promote Washington wine, and stewarded the Washington State University's Wine Science Center construction process.

"Kent has been integral to the quality of Washington wine for wineries both big and small by growing high quality wine-grapes for over twenty years. He has served as a steadfast advocate in the success of educational wine programs across the state and volunteers countless hours serving on numerous industry boards. He is a visionary and works hard every day to ensure that industry education,

continued research, and grower-winemaker collaboration are supported,” shared Tim Donahue, Director of Winemaking | Instructor of Enology at the College Cellars of Walla Walla.

### **LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT –**

**Mike Sauer**, owner of Red Willow Vineyard, received the Lifetime Achievement Award to recognize nearly 50 years of extraordinary contributions to Washington wine industry history. Sauer began Red Willow Vineyard in the early 1970s after marrying into the Stephenson family, where Red Willow has been part of a 4<sup>th</sup> generation family farm in the Yakima Valley. Sauer is known as a quiet leader with an ability to listen to winemaker needs and adapt to a season’s growing conditions, which has taken him to the top of the pyramid of Washington winegrowers. He was on the forefront of implementing drip irrigation, new varieties, trellis systems, field blends, clones, building quality through soil biology, nutrition, and sustainable practices. Sauer spent his life helping build the Washington wine industry, and serving as an ambassador. He lobbied for the start of the Washington Wine Commission, served on its board, and also served as chair of the Washington Winegrowers board. Sauer was named one of 20 national semifinalists for the prestigious 2019 James Beard Foundation award in the Outstanding Wine, Spirits or Beer Producer category. He served as chair of the Washington Wine Commission, chair of the Wine Market Council, and board member the Washington Wine Institute. He was appointed by the Governor to the Washington State University Board of Regents, and along with his advocacy and leadership helped fund and build a world class enology and viticulture infrastructure at WSU.

“Mike’s history of passion, perseverance and faith have elevated him to rock star status in the Washington wine industry. His consistency with dogged determination has made his grapes sought-after by wineries in all corners of our state – he is an icon,” shared Vicky Scharlau, executive director of the Washington Winegrowers Association.

### **GRAND VIN**

**Gordon (Gordy) Hill**, winemaker at Coventry Vale Winery, was awarded the Grand Vin Award, for making a significant impact in the winery, on wine and branding. Graduate of WSU, Hill began his career at Chateau Ste Michelle in 1980, where he eventually became winemaker. Hill was involved in creation of Northstar winery and its high-end Merlot. In the early 2000s, Hill joined Milbrandt Vineyards Winery at Wahluke Wine Co., where he developed several award-winning wines including the red blend for the 2010 *Legends of Washington Wine* event. In the 2010s, Hill transitioned to Coventry Vale where he was one of the first to create large production wine lots for the industry. Charged with producing millions of gallons of Washington wine, Hill is known for getting his clients what they want and works with liaison winemakers from other facilities who buy bulk or use Coventry Vale as a custom facility. He helped pioneer Port wines and spent his early days making Semillon and White Riesling, but for most of his career has focused on red wines. Although he likes to be behind the scenes, Hill is known for making wines that are found in homes across the globe. Also, he is well-known as the winemaker to call to calm growers when operations feel chaotic. Hill has served as a mentor and leader for many aspiring winemakers, paving the way for the new generation of winemakers, and putting Washington wine on the map.

“Gordy’s success in the industry is because he values relationships. Everyone knows and respects him because he does the same. He shares what he knows, calls you back, and always has a story to bring some perspective. Humility and letting people fail and succeed on their own is why he is a great leader. The great wine that he makes is a byproduct of his character,” shared Shane Collins, winemaker at Rocky Pond Winery.

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Photos available upon request.

*The Washington Winegrowers Association serves as the synergistic leader and unifying voice – through advocacy and education – for growers, vintners, partners, and policymakers.*