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## **Indy Wine Competition: Its location is part of the charm**

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. – While nestled amidst humble surroundings in the heat of an Indiana summer, wine connoisseurs banter about Bordeaux, argue over aromas and talk about tannins. Their spirited conversations are serious – after all, they are judging one of the nation's premier wine competitions.

The unpretentious location of the Indiana State Fairgrounds in Indianapolis is fast becoming known for one of the largest and most prestigious wine events held in the United States. The 2000 Indy International Wine Competition will be held July 27 to 29 in the Farm Bureau Building, with more than 2,500 entrants competing in about 70 categories. It ranks among the top five competitions in America, based on total number of entries, and is the single largest such event held outside of California.

This year's competition is expected to attract entrants from 15 different countries, representing famous wineries to small, unknown vintners. The competition is free and open to the public for viewing.

Wine makers enter the competition to gain recognition and a marketing edge. "The Midwest is attractive to vintners from around the world who are searching for new markets," says Richard Vine, Purdue University enologist and honorary chairman of the event. "To win a medal – particularly if it's gold – is a powerful sales tool."

Gold, silver and bronze medals are awarded by consensus votes from teams consisting of five qualified judges. It takes nearly 50 judges about two-and-a-half days to evaluate the entries glass-by-glass. Each panelist will judge nearly 120 wines per day, varying from dry white wines to heavier ports.

"We give them a variety. If you spent the whole day tasting nothing but heavy red wines, by evening your tongue would feel like the whole Turkish army had marched across it," Vine laughs.

Sally Linton, marketing specialist for the Indiana Wine Grape Council based at Purdue, says judging is conducted by the four "s" rule. "Sight, smell, sip, spit – those are the criteria for judges," she says. For each entry, the judges swirl the wine, checking how it looks. They then smell the aroma, sip it and even if it's a good one – spit it back out.

Journalists who cover the event can pit their wine wits against the experts. Reporters can sit among the judging panels and pass their own verdicts on the varieties presented.

Linda McKee, co-editor and publisher of Wine East Magazine, has high praise for the Indy International. "This is definitely a top-notch competition. It's one of the biggest and it attracts wines from around the world. Entrants are going head-to-head with the best," she says.

Linton says the competition attracts both commercial and amateur wine makers. And the wines entered represent a great deal of variety in price. "We can have wines that sell for \$4.99 at the grocery store all the way up to those that retail for more than \$200 per bottle," she says.

Many commercial wine makers got their start as amateurs. As such, the amateur category attracts some unique concoctions. Wines may be made from any fruit, berry, vegetable or honey ingredients. "One year we had a gold-medal winning wine that was made from jalapenos and raisons," Linton says.

The awards will be announced during the Taste of Indiana wine tasting reception Aug. 3 at 6:30 p.m. in the Farm Bureau Building. Tickets for the reception cost \$15 and may be purchased at the State Fair ticket office, (317) 927-1482, or at the door. Those attending receive a souvenir wine glass, which may be used to sample various wines. Medal-winning Indiana wines may also be purchased. Hors d'oeuvres will also be provided by Indiana's major commodity groups.

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