

July 23, 1999

Indy wine competition promises another good year

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. -- The Indiana State Fair Wine Competition, now one of the premier wine events in the country, will judge another record number of entries this year.

The number of entries in the "Indy International" as of July 21 stood at 2,216, well over the 2,100 wines entered from 17 different countries last year.

"For many wineries, an Indiana gold means inventory sold," said Dick Vine, a Purdue University enologist and the man who brought the State Fair wine competition from a regional event of 484 wines to the international extravaganza it is now. "We have great wines from Europe, California and South America, some of the premier champagnes from France, and labels that would impress any wine enthusiast."

For two and a half days, 45 wine judges will serve on nine panels, evaluating each entry glass by glass, sip by sip. Placement is by consensus, and differences of opinion between gold and silver are settled by debate, which can be spirited. In any case, standards are high and medals are difficult to earn, which Vine says is the main reason the competition attracts so many entries. The judges review both amateur and commercial wines, a unique facet of the Indy International.

New this year is the elimination of the Indiana class. Vine says the nascent industry is strong enough now to compete with the other wines of the world and no longer requires a separate category.

Winery marketer Sally Peart said the separate class implied Indiana wines weren't competitive with the other wines. "That simply wasn't true," she said. "The Indiana wineries have garnered enough gold medals in the open class over the past few years that continuing an Indiana class would have been a disservice."

Peart, who works with Purdue and the Indiana wineries to promote the wine and grape industry in Indiana, said one of her most vivid memories of the competition is walking into the back room of the Indy International and seeing thousands of bottles of wine lined up for pouring.

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"It's impressive. With four bottles per entry, there are more than 8,000 bottles back there, with labels from Indiana, France, Chile, California and any other wine area you can think of," Peart said. She and Vine are part of a team of Purdue specialists charged with improving the quality of Indiana wines, matching grape and fruit cultivars to Indiana soils and climate, and promoting Indiana wineries to consumers and tourists.

People who want to get a peek at, and a taste of, the top Hoosier wines, can attend the "Taste of Indiana Agriculture," at the Farm Bureau Building on Thursday, Aug. 5. The event costs \$15, and attendees get an etched wineglass, a recipe book, and the chance to sample Indiana wine and food from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Tickets are available from the Indiana State Fair ticket office.

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NOTE TO JOURNALISTS: *Great photo/visual opportunity.* You are invited to attend the wine judging July 29-31, from 9 a.m. to about 5 p.m. Thursday and Friday and until noon on Saturday, at the Farm Bureau Building at the State Fair. Please contact Sally Peart, Marketing Director, for additional details. Winners will be announced at the Taste of Indiana event Aug. 5.

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