

COMMENTS TO THE IOWA GRAPE AND WINE COMMISSION

The Iowa wine community is at a crossroads – and an exciting one. You have energy, enthusiasm, a commitment from so many diverse yet critical players who can have a positive impact on your industry. You also have the opportunity to look at the states around you and pick and choose from each of them, the best programs they've developed. You can tweak those programs to match your needs and your circumstances and can catapult beyond many of your peers, partly because you can learn from the worst mistakes of others and avoid them.

I am excited for you and a bit envious too.

If I may, I would have several words of advice for the near future:

Use your dollars carefully. Invest in dynamic people who have a passion for wine – you cannot 'buy' enthusiasm and commitment, you must find it. Establish an 'image' and create beautiful display materials and ads which can stand the test of time. Steal from other programs unabashedly. We in the wine community like to share – and we like to see our neighbors succeed, be they other state organizations or wineries down the road. It makes no sense to re-invent the wheel – and if you create good looking, timeless pieces, when the going gets rough, you'll be able to fall back on your human and creative 'investments' until times get better. All of this will happen if you take the time to develop a long range strategic plan which takes into account the needs of all of the players in your industry. Make sure you get someone to help you who 'gets it' *re:* your industry and your needs.

Take advantage of the friends you have: your university, your liquor control division, your tourism folks, your retailers and restaurants, your economic development agencies – they all want you to succeed and by creating an 'inclusive' atmosphere, all of you will move forward and 'win' together. They can become a cheering team for the industry which provides credibility, support, opens doors – use them – and make them a part of your future.

Make sure you develop and maintain a strong, independent privately funded trade association. While public dollars are critical to most states' wine programs success stories, when public dollars become scarce, often programs like ours are among the first to be cut. Additionally, wine is, despite what many of us like to believe, regarded as an alcoholic beverage by many, and as part of the devil's work to others. If for some reason, the winds of time cause wine to fall into disfavor with those in the political arena, a private organization will be on hand to 'protect' those dollars – and to continue to move forward should those monies disappear.

You have some exciting opportunities ahead. I wish you well and look forward to watching your progress from that other four letter Midwest state that begins and ends with vowels.

Donniella Winchell
Executive Director
Ohio Wine Producers Assn.