



MEDIA RELEASE

June 5, 2024

INVIGORATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF GRAPE GROWERS

Grape Growers of Ontario is 77 years young and invigorating the next generation of growers while celebrating our past.

Through funding received by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Grape Growers of Ontario have developed an on-line digital record to commemorate its people and its accomplishments. The 75th Anniversary record provides a detailed review of the organization established by grape growers to ensure a vibrant future for the industry. Keeping an eye to the future, an important part of the project is to showcase the next generation of grape growers.

“As we celebrate Local Food Week, the government is pleased to recognize the Grape Growers of Ontario for their efforts to engage youth and benefit from generational leadership within their sector,” said Lisa Thompson, Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. “This funding represents our steadfast commitment to achieve our Grow Ontario Strategy goal of attracting and growing the province’s agriculture and food talent.”

Grape Growers of Ontario represents an industry with 500 grape growers and \$112 million farm gate sales annually. The Anniversary digital record features individuals and events that have shaped the industry, from the establishment of the Grape Growers Marketing Board in 1947 with growers shipping Concord grapes for juice, to its transformation to today’s grape and wine industry that combines primary agriculture with value-added agriculture, agri-tourism and culinary tourism that spans the province.

The record highlights growers and researchers who have made an impact on the grape and wine industry and their local communities through the decades – industry greats such as Ron Moyer; who as Chair of the Growers in the 1960’s, promoted the industry relentlessly. Brian Nash; who advocated tirelessly for the Ontario wine industry when trade agreements threatened to disrupt the industry. Under his leadership, the grape and wine industry secured government support to pave the way for a transition to vinifera wine grape production. Art Smith; who in the 1980’s campaigned to change the rules of wine retailing, to permit Ontario’s wine stores to be allowed to accept credit cards, and to permit Sunday openings of on-site winery stores.

“As we reflect on the past, our challenges, success, and the strong roots that we have established, let’s keep on cultivating and nourishing the plans we lay for the future to provide a fertile environment that will set up future generations for success,” said Matthias Oppenlaender, Chair, Grape Growers of Ontario.

A Next Gen group, chaired by Jessica Solanki; a fourth-generation grape grower, and Vice-Chair Will George; whose family began their Ontario farm in the late 1700s, has been established as a Committee of the Grape Growers of Ontario to develop the next generation of growers into industry leaders. We look to the next generation to enthusiastically carry the Ontario grape industry to new heights.

Meet some of our generational families of growers featured in a series of videos on Grape Growers of Ontario's [Youtube channel](#) and on Instagram, Facebook and X (formerly Twitter). [Whitty Family https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgZonEVNA_0] Read more of the fascinating history and the growers who shaped it at <https://grapegrowersofontario.com/who-we-are/75th-anniversary/>.

-30-

Quotes:

“Grape Growers of Ontario is grateful for the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs funding for our *Invigorating the Next Generation* initiative. Minister Lisa Thompson is a strong advocate for the Ontario agricultural community and we appreciate her enthusiastic support of our next generation of grape growers.” - Debbie Zimmerman, CEO, Grape Growers of Ontario.

Contacts:

Debbie Zimmerman, CEO, Grape Growers of Ontario
905 401-2471 d.zimmerman@grapegrowersofontario.com