

Grape Growers of Ontario elects 2025/26 Board of Directors

April 11, 2025 (St. Catharines): Debbie Zimmerman, CEO of the Grape Growers of Ontario, is pleased to announce the organization's 2025/26 Board of Directors and 23-member Grower Committee. I am also pleased to announce that the Chair, Matthias Oppenlaender, and Vice-Chair, Kevin Watson, have been re-elected.



Matthias, with his wife Monica and their five children, live in Niagara-on-the-Lake, where they farm over 800 acres of certified sustainable vineyards. Matthias was elected Grape King by his fellow grape growers in 2006, and the following year was elected to the Grape Growers of Ontario's Growers' Committee and the Board of Directors. In 2009 Matthias was elected Vice Chair of the Board, a position he held until he was first elected Chair in 2016. In addition to the GGO Board of Directors, Matthias is the Chair of Ontario Grape and Wine Research Inc. (OGWRI), a for-profit joint Board of growers and processors established in 2007 to determine, guide, and fund the research priorities of Ontario's grape and wine industry. He is also the Treasurer of the Canadian Grapevine Certification Network (CGCN). CGCN is a national not-for-profit corporation established by provincial industry associations from Ontario, BC, Nova Scotia, and Quebec to advance the Canadian grape and wine industry with a sustainable supply of certified propagative grapevine material. Matthias also represents the Grape Growers of Ontario on the Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers' Association Board of Directors and Management Committee and is the Chair of OFVGA's Finance Committee.

Kevin Watson and his family have been involved in Ontario's grape and wine industry since 1978, farming approx. 100 acres of certified sustainable vineyards. Kevin was first elected to the Growers' Committee from 1999 until 2003, including one year as a Director (2002-03). In 2007, Kevin was named Grape King and was re-elected to the Growers' Committee and the Board of Directors the following year, a position he held until being elected Vice Chair in 2022. Kevin is the GGO representative on F.A.R.M.S and Ontario Wine Appellation Authority (VQA) Board of Directors and is active on the GGO's Advisory and Metrics Committees. In addition to the vineyard, Kevin, his wife Cathy and their two children also operate an onsite home winemaking and barrel business, Watson's Barrels & Winemaking Supplies.



Erwin Wiens, Board Director representing District 1, Niagara-on-the-Lake, has stepped down after serving ten years on the Board. The Board thanks Erwin for his dedication as an active and respected member. Erwin generously served on several internal committees and represented Ontario's grape growers throughout the industry. Erwin will continue to represent the growers on

the Irrigation Committee.

The Board of Directors welcomes their newest member, Dan Lambert, as the District 1 Director. Dan is a fourth-generation grower in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Dan has been a Grape Growers of Ontario Growers' Committee member for the past 8 years and serves on the IT, Sustainability and Next Gen committees.

The Board of Directors also includes representation from across Ontario, including Steve Pohorly and Jeff Duc of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Will George and Joe Schenck of St. Catharines, Brock Puddicombe of Winona, Robert Peck of Prince Edward County, and Murray Wilson of Harrow.

The Grape Growers of Ontario welcome Trevor Falk, Mark Lepp, Rick Smith, Philip Wiley and the following members of the 2025/26 Growers' Committee:

District 1 - Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Falls - Jeff Duc, Trevor Falk, Ben Froese, Dan Lambert, Mark Lepp, Matthias Oppenlaender, Steve Pohorly, Pis Seeger, Rick Smith, Chris Van de Laar, and Kevin Watson.

District 2 - St. Catharines, Lincoln, West Lincoln, Hamilton, Wellington, Dufferin, Peel, Halton - Doug Funk Jr., Will George, Chris Mullet-Koop, Brock Puddiecombe, Joe Schenck, Craig Schmidt, Benjamin Whitty, and Philip Wiley.

District 3 - Southwestern Ontario, Waterloo, Perth, Huron, Grey, Bruce - Murray Wilson and Mat Vaughan.

District 4 - Eastern and Northern Ontario - Rob Peck and Keith Tyers.

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