FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CAWG Announces 2025 Awards of Excellence Recipients

SACRAMENTO, September 9, 2024 – The California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG) is excited to announce the selection of the Miller Family – The Thornhill Companies of Santa Barbara County as its 2025 Grower of the Year, and Randy Heinzen, President of Vineyard Professional Services as its 2025 Leader of the Year.

"We applaud the outstanding leadership of the Miller Family and Randy Heinzen, whose contributions have helped elevate the winegrape industry while inspiring positive change," said CAWG President Natalie Collins.

"The Miller family's enduring commitment to the California winegrape industry is truly remarkable. Their leadership in sustainable farming practices and active engagement in industry advocacy have greatly strengthened the entire winegrape community," shared Collins. "Their dedication has made a lasting impact, benefiting not only their own vineyards but on shaping the future of California's winegrape industry."

"Randy Heinzen exemplifies the kind of leadership that propels the entire winegrape industry forward. His commitment to sustainability, innovation, and community engagement has set a standard that inspires others," Collins continued. "Randy's contributions reflect his dedication to the success of our growers and the future of the industry. We are fortunate to have such a visionary and passionate leader within our community."

2025 CAWG GROWER OF THE YEAR

The Grower of the Year Award, the highest honor bestowed by CAWG, recognizes individuals, families, or companies for exceptional excellence in viticulture, successful management, innovation, and leadership within the industry.

The Miller family's farming heritage on the Central Coast spans five generations. In 1969, brothers Bob and Steve Miller embarked on a mission to create a vineyard that would be recognized among the world's elite. Their effort culminated in the planting of the Bien Nacido and French Camp Vineyards, a project that also honored their family's 100th year of farming in California. Today, Bien Nacido is recognized as one of California's finest vineyards and ranks among the top 25 vineyards in the world.

The Miller Family led by Stephen Miller and his sons Marshall and Nicholas, have played a pivotal role in fostering the wine industry in Santa Barbara County and the Central Coast, collaborating with artisan winemakers to help the region flourish. Their commitment extended to launching two custom crush facilities on the Central Coast designed to support local wineries and bolster the industry. The family takes pride in their partnerships with winery customers, working closely to transform their grapes into premium wines enjoyed around the world.

The Miller family not only holds a significant presence on the Central Coast but also stands as trailblazers in terms of industry leadership. The family is highly engaged in leadership at the local and state levels industry-wide and have been active CAWG members.

“Part of what makes the winegrape business so special is the fraternity of those who are in it,” said Marshall Miller. “To be recognized by our peers feels like the highest form of compliment and we take this award with the greatest sense of appreciation.

2025 CAWG LEADER OF THE YEAR
The Leader of the Year Award recognizes an individual whose record of exceptional leadership has benefited California's wine industry.

Randy Heinzen, owner and President of Vineyard Professional Services (VPS) and first-generation winegrape grower in Paso Robles, exemplifies the intersection of innovation, community engagement, and environmental stewardship in viticulture. Randy's dedication to both professional excellence and environmental responsibility ensures that growers are equipped with the knowledge and tools to produce exceptional winegrapes while minimizing their environmental footprint.

Heinzen's leadership in viticulture is fueled by his unwavering commitment to sustainability and excellence in every facet of the industry. His dedication to the winegrape community is evident through his active involvement in numerous organizations. Heinzen approaches these contributions with intention, striving to make a meaningful impact on his colleagues, clients, and the entire viticulture community.

“It’s hard to consider receiving this award in light of the accomplishments and stature of those previously awarded,” comments Heinzen. “If anything, this acknowledgment serves as a challenge to me to justify it by advocating even more fiercely for winegrapes to be crowned as our State’s most water-efficient, locally distinct, soul-affirming, gathering-inducing, heart-healthy, and best-tasting agriculture product.”

RECEPTION
To honor and celebrate the awardees, CAWG will be hosting an Awards of Excellence Reception on Tuesday, January 28, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. The reception will be held during the Unified Wine & Grape Symposium, immediately following the welcome reception at the Sheraton Grand Hotel in Sacramento. All are invited to attend and help us celebrate the contributions of both the Miller Family and Randy Heinzen.

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