



For Immediate Release

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## **Columbia Gorge AVA Marks Fifth Anniversary of Recognition**

*Success follows diversity of unique winegrowing area*

*July 2, 2009 - Hood River, Oregon* The Columbia Gorge Winegrowers Association is proud to note the fifth anniversary of the federal recognition of the Columbia Gorge American Viticulture Area (AVA). The Winegrowers Association incorporated in 2000 with the goal of achieving AVA status for the roughly 300 square miles that represent a world of micro-climates and are perfect for growing a variety of wine grapes. Federal recognition came on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2004, after years of research and an outpouring of support from winegrowers and winemakers in the area and beyond. In the past five years, the association has expanded its role to the task of raising awareness of the wines of the Columbia Gorge as well as including as members the wineries of the western end of the Columbia Valley, including Goldendale, WA and Arlington, OR.

Most AVA designations are bestowed to specific grape growing areas that are noted by a distinct similarity – in the soils, climate, aspect, varieties grown, etc. The Columbia Gorge AVA is markedly different – in that it is the uniqueness and variety of growing conditions in a small area that makes it a notable region. The letters of support in the original AVA application consistently note the uniqueness of the region and the superior quality of the grapes grown in the area.

The verdant, western border of the AVA, just west of Hood River, OR and including Underwood Mountain, WA sees rainfall in the range of 40 inches, annually. In stark contrast, the Eastern border of the AVA – around Lyle, WA – receives 18 inches per year. As you venture east into the Columbia Valley AVA, the rainfall drops at the rate of approximately an inch per mile.

Rainfall isn't the only point of difference in the Columbia Gorge; the combination of variations in topography, soil types, temperature, sunshine all come together to form a region that can produce Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Gewurztraminer near the western borders to Merlot, Syrah, and Cabernet Sauvignon at the eastern edge. Currently, growers in the Columbia Gorge Winegrowers association report Thirty-one different grape varieties being grown in the area. The Columbia Gorge AVA planted acreage has grown from 284 acres by 24 growers in 2004 to well-over 400 acres and 40 growers in 2009.

The diversity of the winemakers in region follows the diversity of grapes produced. The wineries of the Columbia Gorge winegrowing region are all family or individually owned, from the smallest producers to Maryhill Winery, Goldendale, WA the 10<sup>th</sup> highest grossing winery in Washington State. Production for the other thirty Association wineries ranges from 200 – 5000 cases a year. In 2004, there were 14 wineries in the Columbia Gorge AVA, in 2009, there are 20.

The variety of wines produced reflect the “World of Wine” growing conditions in the Columbia Gorge, and the winemakers are as unique as the grapes produced. Locals and transplants, old and young, the winemakers

of the Columbia Gorge all share a common trait: Passion. Some wineries choose to put the Northwest twist on classic old-world styles such as Phelps Creek Vineyards focusing on Burgundian-influenced pinot noirs and chardonnays, Syncline Wine specializing in Rhone-influenced varietals and blends, and Cascade Cliffs producing Northern Italian Barbera and Nebbiolo. Some wineries seek to let the wines be a pure expression of the grapes they grow, like The Pines 1852 Old and New Vine Zinfandels, Mt. Hood Winery and Pinot Noir, and Wind River Cellars and Tempranillo, Cabernet Franc and Lemberger. Organic wines are a specialty for Klickitat Canyon/Columbia Gorge Winery in Lyle, WA as well as Pheasant Valley Winery in Hood River, OR.

The quality of wine produced in the area has not gone unnoticed. In 2007, Cathedral Ridge Winery, Hood River, OR was named 2007 Oregon Winery of the Year by Wine Press Northwest. This year, Maryhill Winery received the honors for the 2009 Washington Winery of the Year by the same publication. The wine competition awards for the wineries in the Gorge number close to 1000, and the ratings have been strong in Wine Periodicals such as Wine Enthusiast and the Wine Spectator.

The Columbia Gorge Winegrowers note the support of Travel Oregon funding in their success. Grant funding from Oregon Tourism Commission, along with the Oregon Investment Board, allowed the creation, production and distribution of a high-quality map and visitors' guide in 2006-07. Production of the map has grown from 50,000 annual copies in 2006 to 100,000 copies in 2009. The Columbia Gorge Winegrowers were awarded another grant from the Oregon Tourism Commission for 2008-09 for the development of a Passport Weekend. The Passport Weekend, held March 27 – 29, 2009 was a great success and boosted business for the wineries in the area, along with other businesses, on an otherwise low-revenue, shoulder-season weekend.

Another element of success for the Columbia Gorge Winegrowers is their contributions back to their local communities. In addition to the direct contributions associated with being responsible business partners, the local winegrowers have been advocates for a variety of charities, non-profit associations and community fundraisers. The association itself took on the role of championing Hospice of The Gorge in 2007, the regions oldest and largest non-profit hospice organization, when it turned an annual wine tasting event into a fundraiser for Hospice. The proceeds from the Gorge Wine Celebration for Hospice grew to a \$25,000 donation to Hospice of the Gorge in 2008, a 250% increase over 2007's donation. This year the event will be held, Saturday, August 8 in The Gorge Room of the Best Western Hood River Inn, Hood River, OR.

To honor the success of the region in the past five years, the Columbia Gorge Winegrowers are launching a "Celebrate Five Years in Five Words" online contest during the month of July. They are asking the fans of Columbia Gorge wines to describe their ideal visit to the Gorge Winegrowing region in five words. The best entry will be chosen on August 3 and the winner will be awarded two tickets to the Gorge Wine Celebration for Hospice in Hood River, Oregon on August 8, as well as overnight accommodations. The "Celebrate Five Years in Five Words" contest begins July 1<sup>st</sup> and will run through July 31<sup>st</sup>. Prize details, rules and regulations will be on the website [www.columbiagorgewine.com](http://www.columbiagorgewine.com).

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**Columbia Gorge Winegrowers Association** is a nonprofit trade association of local wineries, grape-growers and wine-related businesses that incorporated in 2000 to promote the grapes and wines of the Columbia Gorge region. The group is currently comprised of over 60 members from both Oregon and Washington. For more information visit [www.columbiagorgewine.com](http://www.columbiagorgewine.com).