

Press Release

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Olympic Peninsula Wineries Report Record Attendance at 2008 Red Wine & Chocolate Tour

Numbers Reflect Statewide Increase in Wine-related Tourism

March 18, 2008 – The Red Wine & Chocolate Tour, an annual February event hosted by the Olympic Peninsula Wineries Association, received more visitors in 2008 than any at other time in the event's eight-year history, reflecting a growing statewide trend in wine-related tourism. More than 1000 individuals from around the Puget Sound toured the North Olympic Peninsula during the two-weekend event, February 9-10 and February 16-18. The Association further reports that more visitors than ever before *completed* the tour, visiting all seven of the artisan wineries sprinkled among the towns of Port Townsend, Sequim and Port Angeles.

"Red Wine & Chocolate has always been our most popular event," says Sue Conca, who recently took over as president of the Olympic Peninsula Wineries Association. "Increasing attendance prompted us to expand the event from one to two weekends in 2006. The additional weekend enables more visitors to enjoy the tour without overcrowding."

"We are very pleased," Conca continues, "with the growing awareness that Washington's wine experience lies on *both* sides of the state, and at our wineries' ability to help stimulate the local economy by bringing culinary tourism to the Olympic Peninsula."

According to a new report released in February by the Travel Industry Association (TIA), in partnership with Gourmet and the International Culinary Tourism Association, 27 million travelers, or 17 percent of American leisure travelers, engaged in culinary or wine-related activities while traveling within the past three years. And the share of U.S. leisure travelers interested in culinary travel in the near future (60%) is significantly larger than those currently engaged. The study was conducted by Edge Research among a representative sample of 2,364 U.S. leisure travel respondents.

The report showed that one-in-ten (9.4%), or 15 million Americans, participated solely in *wine-related* activities. Washington was included in the top 12 destinations for wine-related travel

visited by the U.S. respondents in the survey. Wine travelers spend, on average, \$973 per trip, with about one-fourth (23% or \$219) of their travel budget going towards wine-specific activities. Those considered to be “deliberate” wine travelers spend more of their overall travel budget on wine-related activities (\$950 average trip cost; \$339 or 36% spent on wine-related activities).

Another new study titled, “Economic Impact of Washington Grapes and Wine,” shows that wine-related tourism expenditures statewide increased 1,157 percent over 1999 reaching \$237.6 million for 2006, a 165.3 percent increase per year. The number of wine-related tourists in Washington increased from 350,000 in 1999 to 1.7 million in 2006. The study, commissioned by the Washington Wine Commission and the Association of Washington Wine Grape Growers, was developed by MKF Research LLC, the leading research source on the U.S. Wine Industry.

The Olympic Peninsula Wineries Association hopes to continue growing its share of the state’s culinary tourism market by joining forces with local growers and restaurateurs to market the Peninsula as a destination for fresh coastal cuisine and premium local wines. So far efforts seem to be paying off.

Winemaker Dinners Sell-Out

In addition to the self-guided Red Wine & Chocolate Tour, during which visitors drop in on the wineries to indulge in handcrafted red wines carefully paired with an array of chocolate delights, the Association debuted a Winemaker Dinner that enabled visitors to sample the best of the seven wineries in one place. This event, too, was a sellout.

Cedar Creek Restaurant in Sequim showcased the “Best of the Olympic Peninsula,” pairing Italian inspired Northwest cuisine with wine from each of the Peninsula’s seven award-winning wineries. The five-course dinner took place on Sunday, Feb. 17.

A second Winemaker Dinner hosted by Association member Olympic Cellars also sold-out. The event, held on Feb. 9 at *Joy’s Wine Bistro* in Port Angeles, paired multiple courses with Olympic Cellars wines.

The Olympic Peninsula Wineries include FairWinds Winery, Sorensen Cellars, Lost Mountain Winery, Olympic Cellars, Black Diamond Winery, Camaraderie Cellars and Harbinger Winery.

About the Olympic Peninsula Wineries Association

The Olympic Peninsula Wineries Association (OPWA) is a strategic marketing coop purposed with raising the visibility of Olympic Peninsula Wine Country. The Association's seven member artisan wineries, located in the Peninsula towns of Sequim, Port Angeles and Port Townsend, welcome visitors year-round to enjoy their award-winning wines. OPWA hosts three annual events, *Red Wine & Chocolate* in February; *Spring Barrel Tasting* in May; and the *Passport Wine Tour* in November. For further information, visit www.olympicpeninsulawineries.org or call 800-785-5495.

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