

# Vineyard & Winery Management

## Background

### Introduction

*Vineyard & Winery Management* is the leading trade publication for the North American wine industry. Founded in 1975, the magazine has forged two name changes, expanded its geographic scope, and is now published by its second generation. What has not changed over the years, however, is its acute ability to identify specific needs in the wine business and follow through with dynamic solutions to service them. In addition to *Vineyard & Winery Management* magazine, Vineyard & Winery Services, Inc. publishes a *Directory & Products Guide* and *Wine Industry Phone Book*; conducts seminars, conferences and trade shows; and produces three international wine competitions: International Eastern Wine Competition, Grand Harvest Awards, and West Coast Wine Competition.

### History

1962 was a time of great anticipation in the U.S., and especially for young Bill Moffett. A recent graduate of the University of Minnesota, the third-generation newspaperman was working as a cub reporter for the *Minneapolis Star*. Within a year, however, a new opportunity brought him to Portland, Oregon as the Pacific Northwest field editor for Charles Scribner's Sons, the longstanding publisher of text and trade books. His mission was scouting college professors for potential manuscripts on a "beat" that included six states and two Canadian provinces. His time in the West was highly influential as a friendship with David Lett of Eyrie Vineyard (Willamette Valley) introduced Bill to the wine industry.

Bill transferred to the Finger Lakes area of New York in 1965 as the firm's Northeast field editor. In 1970, his interest in grape growing intensified when he purchased a 35-acre vineyard in Hector. "My field editing work followed the academic calendar, so I had all summer to work the vineyard," recalls Bill.

Charles Scribner's Sons closed their college textbook division in 1974, leaving Bill more time for his vines. While researching technical information on viticulture, Bill discovered that the only wine trade publication in the country was exclusively focused on West Coast winegrowing. Following the footsteps of his father and grandfather, Bill became a publisher when he and a partner established *Eastern Grapegrower* in January 1975. He was sole proprietor within six months. "Our first issue was just 24 pages," says Bill. The Eastern grape growing industry now had a voice.

*Eastern Grapegrower* remained a modest enterprise that first year, but Bill struck it rich as an employer. Initially hired as an administrative assistant, Hope Merletti was soon sharing publishing and management responsibilities. A native of Tanawanda, New York who attended college in Buffalo, Hope brought marketing savvy, writing skills and tremendous insight to the table.

The magazine became *Eastern Grapegrower & Winery News* in 1976 as Bill and Hope answered the call of adding East Coast wineries to the mix. They launched Wineries Unlimited Trade Show and Conference that year, offering subscribers a venue to network and source equipment. "Wineries Unlimited keeps the East Coast current with the latest technology and vineyard research without going to California or Europe," says Scott Osborn of Seneca Lake's Fox Run Winery. Held annually in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Wineries Unlimited remains the largest trade show of its kind outside California.

The first Wineries Unlimited further impacted the industry as vintners and growers used the occasion to express their interest in representation. Bill and Hope volunteered to help organize wineries in eastern states, and a handful of forward-thinking producers pledged financial support. Together, they founded the Association of American Vintners (AAV) in 1978. "Growers and wineries were a loose coalition at the time," says David Lett. "It was not easy pulling them together." Jim Trezise of the New York Wine & Grape Foundation adds: "The formation of the AAV was absolutely critical to the development of the wine industry because it's impossible to succeed without organization." (The AAV merged with the National Vintners Association in 1991 to form the American Vintners Association. It is now called Wine America.)

Bill and Hope were very active in the late 1970s. They introduced the Eastern Wine Competition in 1977, drafting judges from the New York City wine press. Offering three related, yet independent products in 1978, Bill and Hope established a parent company named Eastern Grapegrower, Inc. Married in 1981, the couple resigned from the AAV in 1985 when the responsibilities of running their own company demanded more time.

Changes soon followed. The Eastern Wine Competition evolved into the International Eastern Wine Competition in 1986 with the addition of entries from Canada, and eventually, other nations. Largest of all was a repositioning of the company business plan that was inspired by the influx of new wineries, some of which were encountering management issues. The couple reorganized around *Vineyard & Winery Management* magazine to focus on the entire North American wine industry.

The company added the West Coast Wine Competition and Grand Harvest Awards in the 1980s and eventually expanded its educational programs.

Robert Merletti joined his parents in 1995 with the task of establishing a West Coast office in Sonoma County and increasing magazine advertising revenue. He gradually assumed more responsibility, moving from sales representative to vice president, later becoming managing partner. The stage was set for a new regime, and after 22 years in the business, Bill and Hope initiated plans for retirement. A management transition began in 1997 with the establishment of a 10-year purchasing horizon. "Before long," says Bill, "it became clear that Rob was capable of making tough decisions." Rob and his wife Jennifer assumed full ownership in 2003.

### ***Vineyard & Winery Management Today***

Now called Vineyard & Winery Services, Inc., the business that Bill Moffett established in 1975 is carefully evolving under President Rob Merletti. "This company is the quintessential second generation company," says Rob. "The basic business started by the first generation is rock solid, and now the second generation is taking it to new places." Circulation has greatly increased, advertising sales fortified, and educational programs added: Tasting Room Profitability Conference and Trade Show in 1996, Managing the Winery Laboratory Seminar and Trade Show in 1997, and Wine Club Summits in California and New York as well as a Marketing and Public Relations Conference in Washington State in 2005. Furthermore, the magazine was completely redesigned in January 2005. The company also publishes a *Directory & Products Guide* and *Wine Industry Phone Book*.

"The mindset for the first 22 years was *Vineyard & Winery Management* magazine," says Rob. "Now, the focus is Vineyard & Winery Services, Inc., a multimedia corporation that services the North American wine industry." The company's magazine, educational programs and wine competitions are industry standards, but its commitment to service is what truly separates it from the competition. Founder Bill Moffett sums it up best: "We have always been committed to providing the wine industry with the keys to prosper in the management of people, process and technology."