NAPA, CA – California winery members, press and invited guests gathered on Monday, June 8 at Silverado Resort to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Wine Institute and to trace the timeline of political, business and cultural developments that have contributed to the dramatic growth of California wine nationally and internationally in the past seven and a half decades. Formed in 1934 to help rebuild the industry following the Repeal of Prohibition, Wine Institute has been instrumental in establishing California wine as a powerful market and economic force by fostering cooperation across a diverse and dynamic industry toward the common goal of enhancing the public policy environment for wine in the United States.

“Wine Institute’s primary role in educating government leaders on the benefits of a thriving California and U.S. wine industry and the impact of punitive taxes, legislation and regulation has never been more relevant than it is in today’s economic climate,” said Robert P. Koch, President and CEO of Wine Institute. “We address today’s challenges as an organization more than 1000-strong, and an industry that generates 820,000 U.S. jobs and $15 billion in state and federal revenue, brings long-term investment, tourism and pride to our communities and accounts for $18 billion in retail sales or two-thirds of the U.S. wine market and over $1 billion in exports to 122 countries.”

To highlight important events in the California wine business and changes in wine styles, two well-respected industry veterans, consultant Jon Fredrikson of Gomberg,
Fredrikson & Associates and Master Sommelier and Educator Evan Goldstein of Full Circle Wine Solutions, Inc., presented “Milestones in California Wine” featuring rare archival images, footage and historical perspective.

Fredrikson referenced early Wine Institute advocacy efforts, including preserving the right to sell wine directly from wineries (1935) which boosted winery retail sales and tourism, and more later developments, such as passage by the U.S. Congress of the Wine Equity and Export Expansion Act to reduce trade barriers abroad (1984) that set the stage for a concerted effort by Wine Institute and member wineries to develop export markets. Today, California wineries attract more than 20 million visitors annually, while California/U.S. wine exports have increased more than five-fold in the past 15 years.

“The phenomenal growth of the industry in California - America’s wine heartland - has been fueled by steadily-increasing consumer interest and adoption of wine as part of an everyday lifestyle,” Fredrikson noted. “Wine Institute played a key role in the public’s acceptance of wine through its early work for The Wine Advisory Board, advertising wine as a beverage of moderation to be enjoyed with meals, and later by advocating for research on the health effects of moderate wine and alcohol consumption and not just the effects of abuse.”

To illustrate the evolution in California wine styles that paralleled a growing knowledge and fascination with wine and food by mainstream American consumers, Goldstein led the group through a tasting of three wines. Christian Brothers California Cream Sherry – a venerable name – represented the fortified wines that dominated the U.S. market post-Repeal until 1967 when table wine surpassed dessert wine in volume sales. The “fighting varietals” of the 1980s - cork-finished, varietally-labeled, affordable wines that gave Americans a common language for ordering a glass or bottle of wine - were represented by 2008 Fetzer Vineyards Valley Oaks California Chardonnay, a winery founded in 1968. 1998 Duckhorn Vineyards Napa Valley Merlot Three Palms Vineyard was served as a symbol of the explosive growth of small, “boutique” wineries in the 1980s and 1990s throughout the state, usually focusing on wines from a single region and often specializing in one or two varietals.

It was this increasing number of California wineries and the concurrent consolidation of distributors that led Wine Institute to initiate the first direct-to-consumer
wine shipping legislation in California in 1985, setting a path to the 2005 Supreme Court ruling that struck down discriminatory state laws and contributed to wineries now having access to over 80 percent of U.S. consumers in 35 states where Wine Institute has helped advocate change.

“Just as cooking and fine dining in this country have dramatically evolved from the hobby of a few to the passion of many, indeed aided by cable television devoted to 24-hour coverage of chefs and recipes, so has wine achieved mainstream acceptance by our current generations,” said Goldstein.

A timeline of important industry and Wine Institute developments over the past 75 years and a publication chronicling the previous and current work of the organization were also shared at the commemoration event. Both documents cover social, environmental and promotional initiatives that demonstrate the organization’s leadership including Wine Institute’s Code of Advertising Standards (1949/last updated 2005), introduction of the California Sustainable Winegrowing Program created with the California Association of Winegrape Growers (2002) and the partnership with the California Travel and Tourism Commission (2007) on a national consumer campaign to promote California’s wine, food and travel offerings and attract visitors to the state.

Koch recognized the Wine Institute members who serve as officers of its Board of Directors as well as the past chairmen in attendance and his predecessor, John DeLuca, who served as President and CEO for 28 years.

“Our winery members, especially our Board, officers and chairmen, many in the room today, deserve acknowledgement for their vision and support of an organization that serves the collective and long-term interests of California wine,” said Koch. “We salute them for their contributions to Wine Institute and draw inspiration from their accomplishments.”

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TIMELINE 1934 - 2009

1933 - December 5 – Prohibition ends with ratification of the 21st Amendment.

1934 – Industry members sign bylaws creating Wine Institute.

1935 – Wine Institute advocates legislation preserving sales at wineries, allowing for the winery retail sales and tourism. * The University of California officially splits the industry’s educational work with Berkeley taking the lead in teaching basic winemaking methods and Davis teaching viticulture.

1938 – California Department of Agriculture recognizes wine as an agricultural product so the industry can secure a marketing order to create the Wine Advisory Board. Wine Institute is commissioned to promote California wines.

1942 – Wine Institute General Manager Leon Adams and Research Director Louis Geinberg develop educational, promotional and statistical information for a recovering industry.

1944 – U.C. Davis professors Amerine and Winkler publish research on varietal analysis which lays out the degree-day climatic system’s relationship to grape growing, and ultimately the production of higher quality wines.

1949 – Wine Institute adopts principles of good advertising practices for the wine industry, later published as the Wine Institute Code of Advertising Standards.

1950’s – California winery tasting rooms grow in number as travel destinations. Wine Institute reports 250,000 visitors to state wineries in 1954.

1958 – Wine Institute hires its first legislative representative to help overcome trade barriers in all 50 states and on the federal level. Today, Wine Institute has nine legislative representatives and 40 contract lobbyists.

1967 – Table wine surpasses dessert wine in volume sales in the U.S. for the first time since Prohibition.


1980 – The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms establishes new stringent standards for wine labeling and begins a program to identify American Viticultural Areas.

1982 – Wine Institute starts its Washington Week program bringing California winemakers to the nation’s capital. Wine Institute’s presence on the nation’s capital dates back to the 1940s.

1984 – The U.S. Congress passes the Wine Equity and Export Expansion Act to help reduce barriers to trade abroad for American wines.

1985 – Wine Institute initiates the first direct-to-consumer wine shipping legislation in California.

1987 – Wine Institute establishes its first international office in Canada to promote California wine abroad, eventually, there will be 16 international offices. * Congress passes the Alcohol Beverage Labeling Act requiring the Surgeon General’s Warning on wine, beer and spirits labels.

1991 – CBS TV’s “60 Minutes” airs “The French Paradox” broadcast, reporting on how the red-wine consuming French have low rates of cardiovascular disease despite high-fat diets. * Wine Institute refocuses efforts on public policy work in response to increased legislation, regulation and anti-alcohol sentiment.

1993 – Varietal wine sales surpass generic wine sales in the U.S.

1995 – The U.S. Dietary Guidelines acknowledge the health effects of moderate wine and alcohol consumption and the reduced risk for heart disease as well as the risks of abuse for some individuals.

1996 – Wine Institute advocates for U.S. government funding for research on moderate alcohol consumption. More than $10 million is allocated to 15 research projects by the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

1997 – California State University, Fresno becomes the first U.S. university to have a bonded, licensed winery on campus.

2002 – Wine Institute and the California Association of Winegrape Growers introduce the Code of Sustainable Winegrowing, the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance is established in 2003 to implement the program.

2005 – The U.S. Supreme Court rules “that states cannot ban out-of-state wineries from shipping wine directly to consumers while allowing in-state wine producers to do so,” a major victory for wineries in their quest to liberalize shipments to consumers and end discrimination.

2006 – Armed with the Supreme Court decision, Wine Institute works with in-state producers to advocate further change, state by state, to direct-to-consumer shipping laws, increasing the number of legal markets to 80 percent of U.S. consumers. * U.S. Trade Representatives and European negotiators sign a wine trade agreement following almost 8 years of negotiations and over 20 years of discussions. * Wine Institute membership reaches 1000.

2007 – Wine Institute partners with the California Travel and Tourism Commission on a consumer campaign with a national television spot promoting the state’s wine, food and travel offerings.

2008 – U.S./California wine exports to 112 countries surpass $1 billion for the first time.