



CALIFORNIA
ASSOCIATION
of WINEGRAPE
GROWERS

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CAWG Announces 2018 Awards of Excellence Recipients

SACRAMENTO, June 14, 2018 – The California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG) has selected Steve Schafer as the 2018 Grower of the Year and Karissa Kruse as the 2018 Leader the Year. The awards will be presented at the 2018 CAWG Awards of Excellence Program on July 17 in Napa.

The Grower of the Year award is the highest honor given by CAWG. It is bestowed to an individual, family or company that represents an outstanding example of excellence in viticulture and management. The recipient is an efficient and successful producer of quality winegrapes, recognized for innovation and leadership within the industry.

Fourth-generation farmer Steve Schafer is an officer of Schafer Ranch, owner of San Joaquin Wine Company and former chair of the CAWG board of directors. An innovative winegrape grower and vintner, he is deeply invested and involved in all aspects of the industry. For nearly 20 years, his visionary leadership and proactive efforts to advance sustainable winegrowing practices have helped to ensure that his and other vineyard and winery operations continue to be successful.

The Leader of the Year award recognizes an individual whose record of exceptional leadership has benefitted California's wine industry and is an inspiration to others. The recipient has demonstrated an outstanding commitment to issues of significant importance to winegrape growers and has achieved lasting changes to promote and protect the interests of California winegrape growers.

Karissa Kruse is the president of Sonoma County Winegrowers, owner of a 12-acre vineyard and partner in Argot Wines. She is a selfless and compassionate leader who worked extensively with growers, employees and community members during and after the October 2017 wildfires. She is also guiding the initiative to make Sonoma County the nation's first 100 percent sustainable wine region. Her actions are part of a history of leadership focusing on communication, building relationships, strategic thinking and giving back.

"Steve and Karissa are widely respected for their many years of effort to promote California's winegrape growers," said CAWG President John Aguirre. "Both are exceptional leaders within their communities and outstanding ambassadors for sustainable winegrowing practices and California wine. CAWG is honored to recognize them for their unwavering dedication and many contributions to California's winegrape growing community."

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**** Please see articles about the recipients on the following pages ****

2018 CAWG GROWER OF THE YEAR

Steve Schafer

Schafer Ranch and San Joaquin Wine Company

As a winegrape grower and vintner, Steve Schafer is deeply invested and involved in all aspects of the industry. His visionary leadership and proactive efforts to advance sustainable winegrowing practices help ensure that his and other vineyard and winery operations continue to be successful.

THE SCHAFFER STORY

Steve's father, Corky, started farming more than 50 years ago. Steve and his brother, Mike, now run the operation, Schafer Ranch in Madera, which produces winegrapes, raisin grapes and other crops. Steve manages nearly 1,400 acres of winegrapes, including zinfandel, cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay, merlot, grenache, petit sirah, muscat canelli and rubired.

In 2005, Steve and his wife, Cindy, started San Joaquin Wine Company (SJWC). Four years later they launched their own wine production with four varietals – under the Moody Press Cellars label – and it has grown to include more varietals and labels. SJWC's commitment to excellence and value are reflected in its mission: "To produce the highest quality wines possible at affordable prices from select local grape varieties."

WINEGRAPE INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP

Since joining CAWG in 2000, Steve has been a well-respected leader in the organization, serving on the board and as chairman. His continued support included hosting a 2017 CAWG PAC event at his winery, graciously donating the venue and wine.

Steve's leadership also includes serving on the Pierce's Disease/Glassy-Winged Sharpshooter Board and Fresno Madera Farm Credit board of directors, and as a Wine Institute district director. Steve has shared his expertise and insight at grower education meetings and in numerous industry and local news stories.

PROACTIVE ON SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainable winegrowing is an issue that Steve has championed for many years. He was an early board member of the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance (CSWA). He is an original member of the Sustainable Winegrowing Joint Committee, convened in 2001 by CAWG and Wine Institute to provide leadership and guidance for the development of the comprehensive California Code of Sustainable Winegrowing Workbook. The committee has provided technical guidance for the Sustainable Winegrowing Program and helps develop updates to Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing.

Steve was one of many who provided expertise and time to the workbook. "In the tough competitive environment we face, we need to look for every way we can to differentiate ourselves and meet consumer expectations," he said when the workbook was published. "This focus on sustainability is critical for our survival."

Steve was featured in CSWA's California Wine Community Sustainability Report 2009 about his proactive sustainable practices: no-till to reduce dust and conserve water, energy use to improve air quality, and use of solar. When the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District adopted new district rules for dust and diesel control, Steve was already implementing the required practices.

In the report he said, "An attribute of the Sustainable Winegrowing Program is that it has touched every grower in California and elevated every grower in the state to improve practices and their way of farming. Because the program elevates winegrowing in California as a whole, it helps differentiate us from the rest of the world, and at the same time the SWP encourages growers to continually improve by implementing better practices. Growers need to be willing to innovate and to think outside the box, and also be aware of how we impact the community around us."

CAWG board member Davindar Mahil said, "Steve and his family are staples in the Central Valley winegrape community. Not only does he grow top quality winegrapes, but he also owns a diversified operation that includes raisins, figs and almonds. As a past chairman of CAWG, an innovative farmer and a dedicated member of his community, Steve is extremely deserving of this recognition."

ON THE AWARD

"I'm very honored that they've chosen to give me an award," Steve said. "I consider my participation in CAWG as one of the most worthwhile things I've ever done. Our association has done so much to advance winegrape growers and winegrape growing in California. From the moment I joined the board, I was very impressed with the level of ability and commitment of the board members and what we were able to accomplish. I am confident that CAWG will continue to lead the industry with the strength and commitment that has been its hallmark for so long."

2018 CAWG LEADER OF THE YEAR

Karissa Kruse

Sonoma County Winegrowers

During the October 2017 wildfires, Sonoma County Winegrowers (SCW) President Karissa Kruse was a selfless and compassionate leader. She was on the front lines during and after the tragedy – on a professional and personal level. Her actions were part of a history of leadership focusing on communication, building relationships, strategic thinking and giving back.

TAKING THE LEAD AT SONOMA COUNTY WINEGROWERS

Karissa joined SCW as director of marketing in September 2012 and eight months later was named president – the first female to hold the position. Since then, she has guided the implementation of a major agricultural/environmental initiative: to make Sonoma County the nation's first wine region that is 100 percent certified sustainable.

In addition, she spearheaded the relaunch of the Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation in January 2016 (she is executive director) and the launch of the Sonoma County Center for Ag Sustainability in January 2017. In a 2018 article in Forbes, Karissa summed up her job: promote Sonoma County as a world class wine region and protect and preserve local agriculture for the next generation. "Simple concepts, but with a wide array of responsibilities and initiatives that include marketing partnerships, education to the community and our elected officials, working with wine influencers from around the world, promoting Sonoma County agriculture and our commitment to sustainability, providing input on new legislation and regulations that will impact grape farmers, and being a spokesperson and ambassador for Sonoma County's wine community."

As a partner in a small winery, Argot Wines, and owner of a 12-acre vineyard, Karissa can relate to the growers she represents.

CRISIS LEADERSHIP

Like thousands of others, Karissa faced the unexpected disaster of the Wine Country wildfires. During and after the crisis she communicated and worked extensively with growers, employees and community members. Karissa also had to respond to a barrage of calls from newspapers, TV news stations and wine industry publications. She did all of this while dealing with the loss of her own home to the fire.

In the following weeks, Karissa was involved in efforts to rebuild the community and spread the word that the wine region was "open for business." To help agricultural employees impacted by the fire, she joined forces with the Sonoma County Farm Bureau president to establish the Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation Wildfire Housing Support Fund. More than \$1 million was raised and distributed to ag workers and their families who were displaced, incurred damage to their homes or lost wages due to the fire. "Our ag workers are the heart and soul of Sonoma County agriculture and wine community, so we want to do all we can to lessen the impact the fires have caused them," she said.

She also reached out to legislators about the situation. At the April 6 joint information hearing of the California State Senate Select Committee on California's Wine Industry and the California Assembly Select Committee on Wine, Karissa served as a panelist and provided an update on fire and industry recovery.

VOLUNTEERISM AND AWARDS

In addition to her job, Karissa serves on numerous boards and committees: Sonoma County Alliance, United Way of Wine Country, Sonoma County Tourism, Social Advocates for Youth, Sonoma County Harvest Fair, and Santa Rosa Chamber of Commerce. She is on the board for Wharton's Initiative on Global Environmental Leadership and a member of the Global Wharton Women in Leadership.

In recent years, she received the North Bay Business Journal Community Philanthropy Award (2017), Sonoma County Harvest Fair Friend of Agriculture Award (2016), Marshall Memorial Fellowship (2015), North Bay Business Journal Women in Business Award (2014) and Forty under 40 Award (2012). She was also named one of the 22 Most Innovative Women in Food & Drink by Food and Wine Magazine in 2017. For the past two years, she was recognized as one of the top 50 wine industry leaders by Wine Business Monthly.

ON THE AWARD

"I cannot begin to express how humbled I am by this award," Karissa said. "There is no greater honor than to be recognized by the people who I work on behalf of – grape growers! Thank you to the CAWG board of directors and the CAWG organization for this recognition. I love what I do and feel so fortunate that I get to work for grape growers who support a strong community, viable business and the long-term preservation of agriculture."