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Groundbreaking for Cornell University's western New York grape laboratory: Oct. 29

By Aaron Goldweber

PORTLAND, N.Y. - The groundbreaking ceremony for the Cornell Lake Erie Research and Extension Laboratory in Portland, NY, will take place on Monday, October 29 at the site of the new lab in Chautauqua County at 1 p.m.

New York State Commissioner of Agriculture Patrick Hooker, Senator Catharine M. Young, Assemblyman William L. Parment, and New York State Agricultural Experiment Station Director Thomas J. Burr are expected to attend. Grape growers, industry representatives, and local officials are also invited.

With more than \$5.359 million of state funding appropriated in May 2006, Cornell's new laboratory will conduct innovative research and extension programs to serve grape growers in western New York and beyond. The facility will provide expanded field research; modernized laboratory space for research on juice and wine quality; additional office space for research and extension staff, and visiting scientists; and meeting space for grower education and training.

After a careful selection process, Cornell purchased the 53-acre Deakin Farm in Portland, NY, in December 2006, as the site for the new lab. The design phase of the project is nearing completion, site improvements are underway, and building construction will begin next spring. Anticipated completion is early in 2009. Researchers will plant 10 acres of new grapes on the site in spring 2008.

"This state-of-the-art facility will begin a new era in Cornell's rich history of commitment to the grape and wine industry in the Lake Erie region," said Susan A. Henry, Ronald P. Lynch Dean of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell.

"Researchers at the current facility have made major advances in the areas of vineyard mechanization, grapevine physiology, development of economic thresholds, and effective control programs for insect and disease pests of these grapes," said Rick Dunst, manager of the current Vineyard Lab. "Adoption of research-based information has allowed producers to increase yields improve quality, and lower production costs of grapes grown in the Lake Erie region, especially Concord and Niagara."

State Senator Catharine Young led the recent effort to secure state funding for the project with major support from Assemblyman Bill Parment, who has been working to find funds to modernize the lab for more than 10 years.

"Cornell University has provided premier research and services through the Vineyard Lab for many years, not only to local farmers, but to growers across the state and the Great Lakes region," said Young, who chairs the Senate Agriculture Committee.

"The key to success for the grape industry has been a combination of hard work on the part of our growers with applied research and extension coming from the grape research laboratory. A new facility will give the industry a basis for productivity gains going forward. I'm pleased that we have reached this important milestone," said Parment.

Cornell has conducted research and extension programs on a 30-acre vineyard in the Village of Fredonia since 1961. The existing laboratory and field research acreage will be sold. Proceeds will be invested in the long-term operations of the new facility in Portland.

Cornell researchers such as the late Nelson Shaulis, who is internationally renowned as one of the fathers of modern viticulture, and E. Frederick Taschenberg, a research entomologist whose career at Fredonia spanned five decades, dedicated their careers to grape growers and processors in western New York.

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Artist's rendering of the Cornell Lake Erie Research and Extension Laboratory scheduled to open in early 2009. PROVIDED BY STANTEC

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