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Groundbreaking Points to Future of Lake Erie Grape Industry

By Elizabeth Keller

PORTLAND, N.Y.: After conducting grape research and extension work for 46 years at the Vineyard Research Laboratory in Fredonia, N.Y., Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences held a groundbreaking ceremony on Oct. 29 at the site where a new facility will be built in Portland, N.Y. The Cornell Lake Erie Research and Extension Laboratory is scheduled for completion in late 2009.

"This is a great day for Cornell, a great day for Western New York, and a great day for the future of the grape and wine industry in the Lake Erie region and beyond," said Richard Dunst, manager of the Vineyard Laboratory in Fredonia, N.Y.

The new facility will provide state-of-the-art laboratory and educational space for expanding and enhancing the grape research and extension currently provided to growers in the Lake Erie region. The site is a 53-acre vineyard sold to Cornell University by the Deakin family.

Over 200 people attended the ceremony, which began with speakers including New York State Commissioner of Agriculture Patrick Hooker, New York State Senator Catharine Young (R-Olean) and New York State Assemblyman William Parment (D-Jamestown). Afterwards, instead of digging with the traditional golden shovel, obviously pleased VIPs cut grapes off the vines into "groundbreaking baskets" that were designed especially for the occasion.

"This new facility is critical to economic development in Chautauqua County," said Young, who chairs the Senate Agriculture Committee. "Fifty-four percent of all of the grape acreage in New York state is right here in Chautauqua County and is key to our economy and new jobs."

"This is a great day for Chautauqua County, the wine and grape industry and Cornell as well," said Parment. "The wine and grape industry has been a great industry for this county and will continue to be."

"Growers, academics, and government representatives have worked together to meet a genuine need," said Commissioner Hooker.

The new facility will bring together experts and scientists from Cornell University, Pennsylvania State University and Cornell Cooperative Extension for the benefit of grape growers in the Lake Erie region, which extends from western New York across Pennsylvania and into northeastern Ohio.

"Cornell scientists and staff have been doing viticulture research in the Lake Erie Grape Belt for more than 100 years, and their accomplishments have had great impact on viticulture in the region and throughout the world," said Thomas Burr, director of the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, N.Y., which oversees the vineyard program. "The new laboratory offers Cornell a great opportunity to enhance programs in the Lake Erie region and to foster economic benefits to the producers and businesses that will have far-reaching impacts on the grape and wine industries and associated businesses across New York."

The new laboratory facility and research vineyard were made possible through the efforts of Young and Parment, who secured a \$5.359 million state appropriation for the project in the 2007 state budget. The appropriation is the latest step in a 10 year effort to improve the existing vineyard laboratory.

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Caption: VIPS pose for a photograph prior to doing some "ceremonial" pruning. Left to right: Thomas Burr, NYSAES director; Richard Dunst, manager of the Fredonia laboratory; Thomas Davenport, director of viticulture, National Grape Cooperative; Daniel Schrantz, Portland, N.Y. town supervisor; N.Y. State Sen. Catharine Young (R-Olean); N.Y. State Assemblyman William Parment (D-Jamestown); and N.Y. State Commissioner of Agriculture Patrick Hooker

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