

Central Valley lauds viticulture pioneer Petrucci

By LEN RICHARDSON

VINCE Petrucci, professor emeritus of viticulture at California State University, Fresno, was honored by the San Joaquin Valley Winegrowers Association for lifetime service to the wine grape industry in California's Central Valley.

The honor for Petrucci comes on the heels of his being named the 2009 California State Fair's Lifetime Achievement Award winner. But honor is nothing new to the 80-plus-year-old Petrucci. After all, The Vincent E. Petrucci Library at Cal State Fresno, or Fresno State, carries his name and collects information on the subjects of viticulture and enology for students, faculty, staff and related industries.

Petrucci, who taught at Fresno State from 1948 until 1993, helped establish the viticulture and enology academic program and the Viticulture and Enology Research Center, or VERC. Since retiring, Petrucci has published numerous papers and books detailing

Key Points

- Petrucci is honored by SJV Winegrowers Association for lifetime service.
- Bob McInturf, the founder of Allied Grape Growers, is also honored.
- Viticulture is academic, entailing 130 units including chemistry.

wine and grape growing.

The association also honored Bob McInturf, a founder and 31-year president of Allied Grape Growers; and chemist Mike Nury, whose efforts to concentrate grape flavors have helped the table grape, wine and specialty products industries.

State Fair award

The State Fair Lifetime Achievement Award honored Petrucci's development of the Viticulture and Enology Research Center, which opened in 1985 at CSU-Fresno, where he served as professor of viticulture for 45 years and acted as VERC director. Since his retirement, he serves as director emeritus of VERC.



A CUT ABOVE: Vincent E. Petrucci is honored by the San Joaquin Valley Winegrowers Association. He developed the Viticulture and Enology Research Center, which opened in 1985 at California State University, Fresno, where he served as professor of viticulture for 45 years and acted as VERC director. Since his retirement, he serves as director emeritus of VERC.

"This award and every other that I have received are much cherished, more for my family than myself," Petrucci says. "I have been very blessed and honored. I was especially proud to have been honored along with the likes of Peter Mondavi Sr., and Zelma Long, at the State Fair Grape and Gourmet event. I am also especially proud to have received the Davis Distinguished Achievement Award."

Petrucci went on to teach classes in grape and wine production, raisin production and processing, and numerous other viticulture classes. After his retirement in 1993, Fresno State awarded him an honorary doctor of science degree in 1994.

With his expertise in viticulture, Petrucci served as a consultant to more than 53 different grape-growing countries. "Most of these visits were organized by program graduates who were working and living in these countries," Petrucci says modestly. "My graduates are managers or winemakers all over the world who are from families who own wineries and vineyards in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Switzerland — all over."

Secrets of success

"The success of the CSU-Fresno program is directly related to our facilities and philosophy," asserts Petrucci.

"To start with, it is very academic, requiring 130 units in classes like chemistry, math, physics, biochemistry and microbiology. It is one of the most difficult agricultural majors you can take."

"This is backed up with applied project programs, where you must grow and manage at least an acre of grapes — winegrapes or table grapes — and the student follows the grape to market in the bottle — the whole nine



yards," Petrucci says.

"This learn-by-doing experience is valuable even though the student only gets one unit for two or three applied projects. But the student knows how to farm because he has a grape-growing internship right on campus."

Asked if he thinks applied research is making a comeback, he replies, "Yes, but as a matter of balance and not at the expense of academics. Now, for example, some of the applied projects are up to 5 acres. The two are pretty well-balanced with applied [project programs] to further our research experiments."

"Students come first and research is second. This priority of balancing academic and applied learning brings rewards back to the program," he explains.

Petrucci says the mission is to continue to train and educate students for employment in the grape and wine industry, and to respond to the industry's request for applied research by industry priority — and not necessarily the university's.

"Vince Petrucci is truly an icon of modern viticulture in California and beyond," concludes James Prince, interim department chairman for viticulture and enology. "Thousands of people in the field have been touched by Vince and his efforts."

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