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Local winery representative Bill Elsey wins title of ‘Texas’ Best’

7th-Annual TEXSOM Conference notes shift in definition of ‘sommelier’

Irving, Texas (August 17, 2011) — You won’t find the newly anointed Texas’ Best Sommelier 2011, Bill Elsey, working the floor of a restaurant. Rather, he makes his living selling Duchman Family Wines to restaurants and wine shops. His victory marks a growing trend in the wine industry: a sommelier is not necessarily a wine steward, but rather a well-educated, well-rounded wine professional.

Elsey outperformed twenty other competitors in a rigorous three-part wine examination involving service, blind tasting and theory. An elite panel of Master Sommelier judges named him Texas’ Best Sommelier 2011 at a ceremony on Monday evening. The competition is a key part of TEXSOM, an annual wine-education conference. To participate, candidates must be a current resident of Texas and must not have passed the Court of Master Sommeliers’ Advanced Exam.

Upon receiving the commemorative TV Munson Six-Liter Trophy, Elsey expressed gratitude to the event’s organizers and his employers. “This competition is an amazing opportunity,” Elsey said. “I want to thank the TEXSOM team, all the sommeliers here and, of course, Drs. Stan and Lisa Duchman.”

Held on August 15 at the Four Seasons Resort and Club in Las Colinas, and presented by the not-for-profit organizations the Texas Sommelier Association and the Wine and Food Foundation of Texas, TEXSOM is the only event of its kind in the United States. Since its inception in 2005, it has attracted more than 2,200 wine professionals from across the United States,

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and more than 160 Texas sommeliers have competed. The speakers and judges constitute a who's who list of the nation's top wine professionals: Master Sommeliers (MS), Certified Wine Educators (CWE), one Master of Wine (MW) and other respected wine educators.

In addition to laying claim to the title of "Texas' Best Sommelier," Elsey received a scholarship of \$2,500 from the Guild of Sommeliers Education Foundation to be used for a Court of Master Sommeliers certification program. Nathan Prater from Spec's Wine, Spirits and Finer Foods secured the first runner up spot and a \$1,500 scholarship, and David Keck from the Prestige Division of Glazer's Distributing was recognized as second runner up and given a \$1,000 scholarship.

Students traveled from as far away as New York and California to attend the classes, according to Master Sommelier James Tidwell, one of TEXSOM's founders. "Every year, the conference reflects greater diversity. This year we featured an amazing vertical tasting with celebrated winemaker Serge Hochar, who traveled all the way from Lebanon and shared wines dating back to 1969," Tidwell says. "We created this event to serve our local community and in doing so, we inadvertently attracted top talent from across the world because TEXSOM is unique. No other conference integrates all levels of the business and welcomes the public like this one does."

At the awards ceremony, Tidwell and his conference co-founder Drew Hendricks shared some interesting statistics comparing this year's conference to the first one, held in 2005:

- Four Master Sommeliers attended the first TEXSOM, and this year's conference featured the largest contingent of Master Sommeliers at a public event worldwide (more than 25).
- Approximately 100 people attended the first year. This year's seminars and Grand Tasting were sold out with more than 400 attendees.
- In the first year, there was one Master Sommelier in Texas, and now there are six: Guy Stout, Barbara Werley, Drew Hendricks, James Tidwell, Devon Broglie and Craig Collins.

The Four Seasons Hotel Resort and Club in Colinas in Irving will host the group again next year on August 12 and 13, 2012.

The TEXSOM Conference Background

TEXSOM and the Texas' Best Sommelier Competition were founded by James Tidwell MS, CWE, Sommelier at the Four Seasons Resort and Club in La Colinas; Drew Hendricks MS, CWE, Director of Beverage Education for Pappas Restaurants in Houston; and Guy Stout MS, Education Director for Glazer's Distributors.

2011 Sponsors

The event is made possible by the generous support of many sponsors, with scholarships provided by the Guild of Sommeliers Education Foundation. Sponsors include: (Platinum-level) Four Seasons Resort and Club at Las Colinas, Glazer's Distributors, Mercer Estates, Pappas Bros. Steakhouse, Rathbone Wine Group, Republic National Distributing

Company, Structure Born, Tastevin, and Treasury Wine Estates; (Gold-level) Aqua Panna, Chandon, Guild of Sommeliers and San Pellegrino; (Silver level) Alexander Valley Vineyards, BevCo International, Broadbent Selections, Cape Classics, Castello Banfi, Chateau Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, Constellation Wines U.S., Domaine Select Wine Estates, Evening Land Vineyards, Favorite Brands, Flowers Vineyard and Winery, Palm Bay International, Society of Wine Educators, Pioneer Wine Company, Vibrant Rioja and Wines of Chile; Whole Foods Market; (Bronze-Level): Alliance Loire, B Cellars, Blackbird Vineyards, Chateau des Charmes, Cliff Lede Vineyards, The Cultured Cup, Diamond Wine Selections, Duchman Family Winery, Ehlers Estate, Empson Wine Importers, Fisher Vineyards, Frias Family Vineyard, Frontier Wine Imports, Gargiulo Vineyards, Hahn Family Wines, Hanzell Vineyards, Hope Family Wines, Iron Horse Vineyards, Inwood Estates Vineyards, Majestic Fine Wines, Negotiants U.S., Ramey Wine Cellars, Revana Family Vineyard, Rudi Wiest Selections, Saint Arnold Brewing Company, Serendipity Wine Imports, Small Vineyards, Trefethen Family Vineyards, Vineyard Brands, Fredrick Wildman and Sons, Wilson Daniels and ZD Wines; (Education Partners): Guild of Sommeliers, The Society of Wine Educators.

For more information, visit www.texsom.com

The Texas Sommelier Association Background

The Texas Sommelier Association is a trade association comprised of Texas wine professionals. The Association promotes professional wine service standards, outlines paths for further wine education and certification, and raises public awareness about the professional standards and certifications for sommeliers. The organization sponsors the “Texas’ Best Sommelier” competition, with the winner being awarded scholarships for professional certification courses. This competition is held behind the scenes during the TEXSOM conference. For more information, visit www.texsom.com.

The Wine and Food Foundation of Texas Background

The Wine & Food Foundation of Texas was established to connect its members and the general public with the value, creativity and craftsmanship inherently present in the culinary and viticulture arts. This mission is fulfilled by funding grants, scholarships and research aimed at elevating the quality, awareness and enjoyment of good food and fine wine as well as hosting education and social events that enhance the quality of life for members and communities. These programs offer unique opportunities to enrich the minds and palates of guests, who in turn can relate their experience with friends sharing common interests. For more information, visit www.winefoodfoundation.org.

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