

Two Years in a Row for Local Winemaker

SPRINGFIELD, IL – The Illinois Grape Growers and Vintners Association announced the winner of the “2014 Enologist of the Year” award at their annual banquet on January 31, 2015. The award, also called the “Winemaker of the Year” award, was presented to local winemaker Mark Wenzel. What is even more impressive is that Wenzel also received this special award last year, which is quite an honor considering there are currently 108 wineries in Illinois.

Mark Wenzel is the winemaker for Illinois Sparkling Co. and August Hill Winery. He uses grapes from vineyard throughout the state as well as from his own vineyard, which was first planted in 2002. The winery was built in 2004 and the Tasting Room opened in 2005 and has quickly grown into a successful winery, now producing over 6,200 total cases of wine including 550 cases of Illinois Sparkling Co. traditional method sparkling wine and 2,000 cases of carbonated wine.



Mark first started making sparkling wine in 2008, experimenting with both tank-fermented sparkling wine and traditional method sparkling wine. He decided to create Illinois Sparkling Co. as a separate brand because he felt like he had a very special product. The hard work and investment has paid off. Mark’s Illinois Sparkling Co. sparkling wines have made quite a name for themselves, as well as for the Illinois wine industry. Mark and his winery are featured in many well-known publications including, *Vineyard & Winery* magazine, *Wines & Vines* magazine, and *Glass of Bubbly* magazine out of England.

When asked about the biggest challenge he faces, Mark says working with our grapes is a constant challenge as the experience and history is not available like you would find with well-known grapes. He is constantly learning as he goes and works to improve the quality of his wines though research and work with sparkling wine consultants.

Wenzel worked hard to get his company where it is right now. His employees will tell you that he is the first one to arrive at the winery – usually by 4:30 am and he is the last one to leave each day. Mark is passionate about what he does, and anyone who talks with him about wine soon finds themselves getting very excited about wine, specifically wine made here in Illinois.

Mark has had help from a great group of winemakers along the way including Christine Lawlor, Rick Mamoser, Didier Jacquet (sparkling wine consultant from France), Larry Mawby, and Patricia Howe. In turn, he has tried to help others in the winemaking industry by sharing his knowledge at conferences and workshops. He has been a speaker at the Iowa Wine Conference and this year will be speaking at the Mid-American conference.

Mark received numerous top honors throughout 2014: a Jefferson Cup nominee award and two gold medals at the Jefferson Cup Invitational; Best of Show, two Governor’s Cups, five double gold medals, and two gold medals at the Illinois State Fair Wine Competition; one gold medal at the Indy International wine competition; and two gold medals at the Mid-American wine competition.
