

Media Release
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New Zealand Winegrowers celebrates new Fellows

Four wine industry stalwarts have been honoured for their outstanding service to the New Zealand wine industry at the 2017 Air New Zealand Wine Awards.

Joe Babich, Geoff Thorpe, Bill Spence and Lorraine Rudelj have been made Fellows of NZ Winegrowers, an accolade that recognises dedication and influence in New Zealand's flourishing wine industry.

NZ Winegrowers Chair Steve Green said the four Fellows have each made outstanding individual contributions to the development and success of the New Zealand wine industry. Wine is now New Zealand's fifth largest export, valued at over \$1.6b each year.

"Joe's contribution has been in the evolution of winemaking styles and development of wine making standards. Geoff has helped drive improved nursery standards while Bill has made major contributions to viticulture and export growth. Lorraine has given 37 years of unparalleled service to industry organisations, including New Zealand Winegrowers.

"The Roll of Fellows is a who's who of the New Zealand wine industry, dating back to its inception in 1982. As an industry, we wholeheartedly thank Joe, Geoff, Bill and Lorraine for their years of service" said Steve Green.

-ENDS-



Joe Babich

Joe joined the Babich family wine business in 1958 and over the past 60 years has crafted a distinguished career in the industry. Beyond working with his brother Peter to develop and expand Babich Wines, Joe has always served the wider industry. He has been a wine judge for 35 years, reaching the pinnacle of wine judging in NZ serving as a six-time chair of the Air New Zealand Wine Awards. Joe was also a member of the Technical and Winemaking Committees throughout the 1980s. In this capacity he played a vital role in the development of the sensory evaluation tests of the Wine Export Certification Service. This tasting process established a quality foundation that has served to underpin NZ wine exports to the current day.



Geoff Thorpe ONZM

Geoff founded Riversun Nursery in 1982 to supply grafted grapevines to Gisborne vineyards following the discovery of phylloxera. Riversun is now the largest supplier of grafted grapevines to the NZ industry. In 2000 Geoff helped rescue of a collection of grapevine varieties, clones and rootstocks from the national collection at Ruakura. In the same year he launched the first independently audited certification programme for grafted grapevines which led directly to NZ Winegrowers Grafted Grapevine Standard. In 2001 Geoff entered into licence agreements with ENTAV-INRA and other overseas plant material providers to source new grapevine material for the industry, while in 2003 he established New Zealand's first privately owned Level 3 grapevine quarantine facility for the importation of new grapevine plant material. Over many years Geoff has been a strong partner with industry organisations in industry good research, and Riversun has also been a major sponsor of the Bragato Conference for 23 years since the very first conference in 1995.



Bill Spence

Bill Spence, with his brother Ross, founded Matua Valley Wines in the early 1970s, where they planted the first commercial Sauvignon Blanc vineyard in New Zealand, and produced and marketed the first commercial Sauvignon Blanc wine in 1974. Beyond his critical role in the launch of New Zealand's iconic wine style, Bill played a major role in the development of our export drive. In the 1980s Bill was a member of the Export Sub-Committee and in 1990 became the first Chair of the NZ Wine Guild, a five-year partnership with NZTE's predecessor, which promoted NZ wine in the UK. Bill played a vital role in the success of the Wine Guild which provided a model for the generic promotion of NZ wine that has lasted to this day. As a respected member of the west Auckland community, Bill has also made a passionate commitment to local charities. He helped found the Vintners Brunch, which has raised \$millions for the North Shore Hospice for over 20 years, and has also helped raise over \$350,000 with the local Lions Club for local charities.



Lorraine Rudelj

Lorraine has served as PA and office manager, first at the Wine Institute and then New Zealand Winegrowers, for 37 years of dedicated and unparalleled service. She is respected by all in the wine industry, with her outstanding knowledge and generosity in sharing it.

For further information contact:

Steve Green
Chair
New Zealand Winegrowers
027 2083194

Philip Gregan
Chief Executive Officer
New Zealand Winegrowers
021 964 564

