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SWANSON IS SUCCESSFUL IN RE-ESTABLISHING RESPECTABILITY FOR MERLOT

9-city tour and website attract national attention

Oakville, California, summer 2006---To educate the trade about the complex uniqueness of Merlot, Swanson Vineyards took an elaborate merlot seminar on the road this spring, visiting nine cities within a 60-day window---San Francisco, San Diego, Las Vegas, Chicago, New York, New Jersey, Miami, Tampa and Orlando.

An estimated 350 people attended the seminars; a new 'supporting' website (www.MerlotFightsBack.com) experienced 20,000 hits a month since it launched in the early spring. Another indicator of the program's success was that in San Diego a local wine tasting club reproduced the Swanson seminar format in an event for its members.

In 2007, the seminar will be presented in six cities across the country, this time including consumers and educators.

Winemaker Chris Phelps and General Manager Stuart Harrison presented two flights of Merlots from around the world, followed by a flight of Swanson barrel samples. "We're trying to set the record straight on a varietal which has been so misunderstood and maligned," Harrison explained. "We're looking at Merlot from a global perspective, tasting and talking about the realities of the varietal worldwide. The seminar discussed the technical specifics of the variety and the statistical place of Merlot in world grape and wine production," he added.

Supporting this effort was a new website, www.MerlotFightsBack.com, which not only gave details of the seminar but also offered a forum for opinions on Merlot, whether Swanson's or others. "We're coming to the rescue of a wonderful wine, both by bringing this educational seminar to a number of markets and also by bringing the discussion about Merlot to the web," Stuart Harrison said.

Swanson Vineyards, founded in 1985 by Clarke Swanson, is the largest single producer of estate-grown Merlot in the Napa Valley. Since 2004, Swanson has taken its Merlot story "on the road." A year before the movie *Sideways*, Swanson had seen a backlash in public perception about Merlot and designed this seminar to address that.

'Graduates' of the seminar will leave fully versed in all-things-Merlot, whether it's the importance of clay in the soil or that Merlot is the number-one red varietal in France or that the '61 Cheval Blanc Miles opened on his birthday in *Sideways* is a 50/50 blend of Merlot and Cabernet Franc.

The first flight of wines came from all over the globe, all from the 2002 vintage--- Livio Felluga, Casa Lapostolle, La Fleur Gazin, Pepper Bridge and Swanson. The next flight were all from northern California, all 2002---Cuvaision (Carneros), Matanzas Creek (Bennett Valley), Twomey (Atlas Peak), Sawyer (Rutherford) and Swanson (Oakville). The last flight consisted of 2004 barrel samples from Swanson, examples of 7-day vs. 21-day maceration and estate-seasoned vs. commercially-seasoned American oak.

Winemaker Chris Phelps is one of the world's experts on Merlot, having worked and lived in Bordeaux (at Pétrus) before spending 12 years as winemaker at Dominus, Christian Moueix's Napa winery, and 7 years at Caymus. General Manager Stuart Harrison has spent his career as a manager at some of Napa Valley's most prestigious red wine wineries---Opus One and Stag's Leap Wine Cellars among them.

The unique identity of Swanson Merlot is the result of a strict focus on the estate-grown concept. Between Swanson's two Oakville properties, the winery cultivates just over 50 acres of Merlot, and has complete control over all aspects of winegrowing. Oakville is one of Napa's foremost red wine appellations and Swanson grows its Merlot entirely within the boundaries of this A.V.A. The majority of Swanson Merlot comes from its "Oakville Cross Road" Vineyard, located just across the Napa River from Opus One, across the road from Silver Oak, and down the street from Groth, PlumpJack and Rudd. A smaller portion comes from Swanson's other Oakville property, along bench land adjacent to the western Mayacamas foothills.

Swanson Vineyards' Salon (tasting room) is open by appointment only Wednesday through Sunday and offers an elaborate seated tasting experience. The Salon is located at 1271 Manley Lane in Rutherford and can be reached at 707/967-3500. Swanson Vineyards owns 140 acres in Oakville and is the largest single estate-sourced producer of Merlot in the Napa Valley. The winery's current releases are 2003 Merlot (\$32); 2002 Alexis, a proprietary Cabernet Sauvignon-based blend (\$58) and 2005 Pinot Grigio (\$20). Swanson's red wines carry an Oakville appellation.

More information at www.swansonvineyards.com.

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