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Tom Davenport honored by LEAD New York with Outstanding Alumni Award

Presentation at Class 13 Commencement Ceremony on April 15, 2011

The Empire State Food and Agricultural Leadership Institute, or LEAD New York, has chosen to honor outstanding alumni only four times in its 26 year history. This year, the institute will present its Outstanding Alumni Award to Thomas G. Davenport (Class 2). The award was established to recognize the outstanding leadership that program graduates provide to the state’s local communities, its agriculture industry, and the LEAD program itself.

With over 340 alumni, the selection committee's task is challenging, since so many graduates have made significant contributions to the state’s food and agriculture industry. Personal testimonials speak volumes about the leadership style of this year’s recipient: “Tom has been a dedicated worker, an excellent educator and an extraordinary leader for the industry. He’s been a wonderful mentor, and has taught me things about every aspect of my job.” said Jay Hardenburg, a colleague at National Grape Cooperative.

Following 42 years of employment Davenport retired in November of 2009 from his position as Director of Viticulture at National Grape Cooperative; a position he held for 19 years. During his tenure with National Grape, Davenport demonstrated leadership skills in numerous ways. As chair of the New York State Grape Production Research Fund, he worked to raise funds and ensure the scientific research that was funded benefitted the largest possible number of growers. He served as president of the National Grape and Wine Initiative, a nationwide organization representing grape growers, processors, wineries, academia and cooperative extension, which is dedicated to increasing scientific research for the improvement of the industry.

He was committed to the vision of a new research and extension facility for the western New York grape industry and worked tirelessly for several years to obtain funding. In 2009, that new facility opened its doors in Portland, New York. His ability to work with
state departments of agriculture and the federal IR-4 (minor crop use) program helped lead
to registration of new low cost and low environmental impact fungicides for control of
downy mildew and other grape diseases. He served on the Lake Erie Concord Grape
Heritage Association board of directors and assisted in their successful efforts to obtain a
$1 million state grant that was used towards the construction of the new Concord Grape
Discovery Center in Westfield, N.Y.

And he leaves a legacy behind him at National Grape. Says colleague Charlene
Ryder: “What most defined Tom’s leadership style was his ability to develop his coworkers
so that they understood the industry in general, and especially the legislative issues facing
agriculture. He inspired us to take on challenges and to continue to strive to improve the
industry. When he retired we were ready (though with fear and trepidation) to pick up the
gauntlet.”

Although Tom’s participation as a class member in LEAD New York was more
than 22 years ago, he maintains strong ties with the program. Through Tom’s
encouragement several National Grape employees have completed the LEAD program.
Tom was a member of the LEAD New York Board of Directors from 1995 to 2001, serving
as the board’s president from 1997 to 2000.

The award will be presented at the LEAD class 13 commencement ceremonies on
Friday, April 15, 2011. The celebration will take place at the Ithaca Country Club in Ithaca,
N.Y. All LEAD alumni, and Tom’s friends and colleagues, are encouraged to attend and
help us recognize this exemplary leader. Formal invitations will be mailed later this spring.

LEAD New York is a two-year leadership development program for adult
professionals in the food and agriculture industry, and the rural communities in which they
live and work. The program is based in the Community and Regional Development
Institute (CaRDI) in the Department of Development Sociology at Cornell University (an
equal opportunity, affirmative action educator and employer). Applications for the newest
cohort (class 14) of this prestigious program are currently being accepted. For more
information, contact Larry Van De Valk, Executive Director of LEAD New York at 607-
255-7907 or at ljv4@cornell.edu. Additional information is also available on their website
at www.leadny.org.

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