

Grape King has deep roots



2010 Grape King. Debbie Inglis, director of Brock's Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute, was named the 2010 Grape King Tuesday at a breakfast for the Grape Growers of Ontario.

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The Grape Growers of Ontario's latest Grape King is a second-generation grower from Virgil who is doing her part to make sure the industry has many more generations to come.

At a breakfast Tuesday, the Growers announced the 2010 crown would go to Debbie Inglis, who operates Niagara Vintage Harvesters in Virgil, and is the director Brock's Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute, which is dedicated to research into innovation for the industry and just celebrated the 10th anniversary of its first graduating class.

She got her start in the industry as a young girl in 1970 after parents Stan and Doreen Murdza bought their first 10-acre vineyard in St. Davids. Niagara Vintage Harvesters was formed in 1971 and at the time it grew traditional concord and Niagara varieties, but by the mid-70s the family joined a group of pioneers, including Paul Bosc Sr., who were transitioning into vinifera grapes, such as chardonnay, gamay and pinot gris.

When Inglis was eight, she and her brother were sent to pick up grape stumps. It became a sibling competition, and from then on she was hooked.

"I've been in love with the vineyard ever since," she said.

In 1980, the family moved to Niagara Vintage Harvesters' current location in Virgil, and Inglis was part of the team that planted the vines, many of which are still there today. In those days, she said, there was no fancy equipment for planting.

"You got down on your knees and did it by hand," she said.

Inglis and her husband, Rob, now farm 20 acres, growing chardonnay, riesling and cabernet franc for use in Inniskillin wines.

In thanking the Growers for the award, Inglis praised the sense of community in the industry. She said there's a belief in the value of sharing growing knowledge, technology and resources available for the betterment of the community.

When asked what she likes best about the industry, Inglis said it's the pride she and other growers take in rising to the challenge to produce quality fruit year in, year out, despite different conditions each growing season.

"It requires a lot of innovation and ingenuity to respond to changing seasons each vintage," she said. But in a way, describing why she loves the industry does not come easy to Inglis. It's simply that being a grower comes naturally.

"It's always been a part of my life," she said. "I couldn't imagine it not being a part of my life."