

## Meet Debbie Inglis, the 2010 Grape King

By Don Fraser, Standard Staff  
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Debbie Inglis remembers when she first proved her mettle as a grape grower.

In 1970, parents Stan and Doreen Murdza had bought a four-hectare vineyard in St. Davids.

The next year, they formed Niagara Vintage Harvesters. Inglis, to her delight, was drafted into the family business alongside her brothers.

"I remember I was about eight years old. And I was really excited by that job I was given," she said.

"I was picking up grape stumps from the rows, and we'd drag them to the end of a road to a stump pile to burn them. That was my first initiation into grape farming, and I fell in love with the vineyard ever since."

Inglis spoke to a group of about 40 gathered for a Tuesday breakfast where she was named this year's Grape King.

The Grape King, a 54-year tradition, represents grape-growing excellence in the province and helps promote its grape and wine industry.

Inglis, (pronounced Inguls), becomes the ambassador for the Grape Growers of Ontario, and is only the third woman so crowned.

Livia Sipos was awarded the title in 2004 and Donna Lailey before her in 1991.

"The Grape King title is such an honour and I am just thrilled to be accepting this today," said Inglis, 45, a Virgil grape grower and director of Brock University's Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute.

"Ever since Donna Lailey became our first female Grape King, I've really wanted to follow in her footsteps."

Over the years, Ingles' family-run Niagara Vintage Harvesters has grown to encompass 80 hectares of vineyards across the peninsula.

By the mid-1970s, the Murdzas were among a handful of growers who decided to transition crops from hybrids to the higher-quality vinifera varieties.

Debbie and her husband Rob currently farm their own eight-hectare vineyard on Line 4, where they have lived since 1980. Chardonnay, Riesling and Cabernet Franc grapes grown there are used at Inniskillin Wines.

"As a grape grower, we strive to understand our relationship between our site, soil and vines," Inglis told the crowd. "There's such a sense of community, camaraderie, friendship and respect among grape growers."

Inglis, who has a PhD in biochemistry from McMaster University, also teaches oenology and viticulture at Brock.

Her research specialization is in icewine production, grape sour rot and the multi-coloured Asian ladybeetle.

Monday's breakfast announcement was sponsored by RBC Royal Bank, Grape Growers of Ontario and the Niagara Wine Festival.

"We're delighted to have Debbie as the new Grape King," said Grape Grower CEO Debbie Zimmerman. "Debbie brings a family history of grape growing to the role.

"It's wonderful having having a female as king."

Inglis' official installation happens at her vineyard Wednesday at 2:30 p.m., following the annual wine festival celebrity luncheon at Club Roma in St. Catharines.

Last year's Grape King was Bill Schenck, a fourth-generation St. Catharines grape grower.