

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Branding Effort for the Lake Erie Grape Region Announced



Mayville, NY – America's Grape Country, a branding initiative for the Lake Erie Concord Grape Belt was announced at the Enhancing Our Regional Flavors Conference held at Chautauqua Suites on Wednesday. The America's Grape Country branding campaign is the result of a collaborative effort between the Chautauqua-Lake Erie Wine Trail, the Concord Grape Belt Heritage Association and the Chautauqua County Visitor's Bureau as part of a regional branding grant provided by the New York State Wine & Grape Foundation.

Stephanie Burdo, Communications Coordinator with Chautauqua County Visitors Bureau is serving as the regional branding project team leader. Burdo noted that "America's Grape Country incorporates the themes of Heritage, Hospitality, and Health to describe the grape region from Silver Creek, NY to Harbor Creek, PA. Historically known as the Concord Grape Belt, the region boasts the oldest and largest Concord grape growing region in the world and the largest grape growing region in the United States outside of

California. In 2006, the Lake Erie Grape Region became the first Agricultural Heritage Area in New York State."

The region is also rich with farm markets and fruit stands, over 85 in Chautauqua County alone and by this summer, 21 wineries will be open for tours and tastings along the Chautauqua-Lake Erie Wine Trail. In addition to agriculture, the region is known as "Steelhead Alley" for the abundance of steelhead trout in Lake Erie's tributary creeks and as a major watch spot for migratory birds and raptors.

Concord grapes share a distinction with blueberries and cranberries as one of only a few fruits native to North America. According to the website, www.healthyconcordgrapes.com, Concord grapes yield a high concentration of vitamin C and antioxidants to promote heart health and support a healthy immune system.

Burdo added that the goal of the initiative was to unify the varied perspectives of regional grape growers, juice producers, wine makers, and tourism promotion agencies to create a single brand incorporating the common objectives of all. The group identified a lack of public awareness as their first challenge to overcome. Over 800 farms cultivate 30,000 acres of vineyards in this region that runs approximately 50 miles along Lake Erie. The New York portion of the Lake Erie Grape Region produces more than 60% of the state's overall annual grape tonnage, whereas the Finger Lakes Region is commonly misidentified as New York's primary grape region. At the conference, Duncan Hilchey, Senior Extension Associate and agriculture development specialist with the Community Rural Development Institute at Cornell University described the uniqueness of the grape region. "You may not realize this," he said, "but there is no where else on earth like the Lake Erie Concord Grape Belt."

The new brand and awareness building campaign will promote the unique history and local flavor of the grape region located within Chautauqua County, New York and extending into Erie County, Pennsylvania. Plans include print advertising in major regional and women's magazines, a new website incorporating photos and stories from America's Grape Country, and a map of the natural and cultural history of the region created by local artist Mark Baldwin. Guidelines and use of the new logo will be by permission of the regional branding group.