



THOMAS JEFFERSON WINE COMPANY

Thank you IGGVA for the invitation to present to your membership.

- A. Who is Fred Reno and why was I invited to speak to the Conference. Let me briefly detail my wine industry experience and talk about the importance of maintaining intellectual curiosity and how that applies to Illinois winegrowing history.
- B. (Take a cue from the Title of my presentation, the Wine World and how Illinois can have a position).

Let me start with “You do not have to produce wines from *Vinifera* grapes to be taken seriously, either by the Trade, or the consumer. You just need to produce interesting wine. By this I mean wine of very high quality and consistency. If you can achieve that you will sell wine to a greater audience than you currently do. I like to refer to Great wine as the 1/10th of 1% of all wine produced in the world today. Folks, there is a large amount of very high-quality wine being produced throughout the world today. It is my understanding that Illinois has in some corners of the wine world a reputation for producing poor or sweet wine. Virginia went through this and continues to dig out in some quarters of the trade with that image because of the wines that were produced early on in the ‘70’s and up through the early ‘90’s. But, just like Virginia, (and other not so well-known winegrowing regions throughout the county) Illinois can produce wines of authenticity that reflect what grows best in certain regions of the state. I would advise you to think about your state like the industry thinks about France or Italy. For example, they don’t grow Cabernet Sauvignon in Burgundy and they don’t grow Pinot Noir in Bordeaux. I am sure there are regions of the state that grow world quality Chambourcin that won’t grow

as well in other parts of the state. Just as there parts of the state that excel at growing and producing Chardoneel or other grape varietals that do well in Illinois. In short, produce Illinois Wine.

- C. Let me pose this question to this group. Ask yourself are you in the Hospitality Business or the Wine Business? The answer to this question will then give you the framework to develop a strategic vision for your future, even if you believe you have already done this.

- D. I began my planning for this presentation with a simple S.W.O.T exercise. Who knows what a S.W.O.T exercise is? This acronym stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, & Threats. However, I could only identify weaknesses, as I don't know enough about the strengths of Illinois winegrowing. I can, however, certainly see opportunities based on the quality of the wines I have tasted so far from Illinois. So, I intend to flesh this out more in the coming weeks as I am intrigued and interested in learning more.

- E. Illinois has the potential to be recognized as a new and exciting emerging wine region. It will require targeted Wine Education and stimulating Intellectual Curiosity within the Trade and Press. This cannot be understated. This is where the State of Illinois needs to jump in and support the industry with dollars for research and promotion. From what I know that is just beginning to happen. This is how Virginia started to grow and prosper., and I assume most immature winegrowing region as well. It was the Governor and the legislature in Virginia who sparked this with an initiative back in 1984 and formed the Virginia Wine Board and it's Marketing office and the funding has continued to grow since. The Illinois Grape Growers and Vintners Alliance need to follow suit and lobby to get the state to step up and help build the future of winegrowing in Illinois. Not necessarily create a government run association but just one that can help with funding/ While you are working on gaining this level of support from the State there needs to be a continued collaborative effort by all the quality wine producers in the state to work together and share information

about what works and doesn't work in Illinois vineyards and ultimately in the market.

- F. At its basic level this is about winegrowing. It begins in the vineyard whether you own the vineyard, do the farming, or buy from a Grower. Growers and winemakers need to work in Unison, so the best quality grapes are grown, resulting in the finest quality wines. Growers need to be paid accordingly and the producers need to be able to charge profitably as well.
- G. My suggestion is that each of you do your own S.W.O.T. analysis. From here you can develop a Brand Plan that clearly articulates what your Brand stands for and the strategy to communicate it.
- H. Once this exercise is done and you go about creating your Brand Plan understand there are three legs to the stool. They are Consumers, Trade, & Press. You then determine how you will tackle the individual challenges you may have within anyone of these 3 pillars to success. Admittedly, this will not be easy nor are there any shortcuts you can take. However, hard work backed up by Quality & Confidence is an equation that cannot be beat.

A few closing thoughts. You should strive to be Relevant in the world of wine. The most successful wineries I have seen during my 44 years in this industry find a way to achieve Relevance, and then, continue to reinvent themselves to remain Relevant. (i.e., Shafer Vineyards). There is nothing to say that Illinois wine cannot be Relevant in the World of Wine. It is just up to each and every one of you to contribute to making that happen.

One last important point I want to make.

Folks, America is a Branded Culture. We buy and often times remain loyal to a Brand that we identify with. The wine world can sometimes be the least Brand loyal customer there is. However, once you have produced high quality wine, unfortunately that is not enough. What I saw when I first move to Virginia in 2019 was high-quality wine, significant State support but often sub-par packaging. You need to recognize that the public buys package, especially in a perceived luxury. While wine is considered in most cases an affordable luxury it still needs to have a look of quality an aesthetically pleasing packaging.

When I started in the retail wine business in the late '70's the one thing that became very clear to me early on was if I could get a bottle of wine in the customers hands, 75% of the time they would buy it. Your Package, especially your label should have two elements front and center. The Brand Name and an Icon that represents some hidden meaning but not too mysterious. Next time you are in a retail wine shop check out the Labels of some of the finest Champagnes, Burgundies, and other top-quality wines. You will then understand what I am saying. The best labels in the business never change their look. Or, if they do, it is so subtle that you hardly even notice.

If I could let me share a Packaging/label story that I encountered and let a California winery to change, and their repositioning led them to success.

So, in conclusion, will the Illinois Winegrowing Industry look different and be more productive and profitable 30 years from now. Well, walk that timeline back at yourselves; is it 25 years, 20, 10, 5 years. It can be today if you all get together and make it happen. It is within your power if you choose to grab it. I sure hope you do.