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Simon Siegl's Wine Industry Experience

Simon's work with the wine industry began in 1985, as Executive Director of the Washington Wine Institute, a dynamic trade association focused on government relations initiatives to protect and enhance the business environment for Washington wineries. Along with deflecting harmful excise tax increase proposals, Simon led efforts to eliminate the use tax on oak barrels and to establish Washington as one of the early "reciprocal states" for direct shipment of wine to consumers. Association membership grew during Simon's tenure from 32 to 66 wineries.

The most important legislative initiative, though, was the creation of the Washington Wine Commission, for which he concurrently served as Executive Director. In meeting the generic promotion and marketing needs of all the state's wineries and grape growers, Simon implemented an extensive and diverse media relations program; produced four biennial international conferences (The World Vinifera Conference) bringing global wine industry leaders, wine media and other opinion leaders to the State; created and managed touring programs to major markets throughout the U.S. involving winemaker presentations to media and influential wine trade audiences; created a three-state Northwest Wine Promotion Coalition to conduct federally-funded export promotion activities in selected foreign markets; and, produced the first nine years of the charitable Auction of Washington Wine. These and other campaign elements helped convert the industry's prior negative image into recognition as a high quality wine region, and support extraordinary growth which continues today.

In 1996 Simon was recruited away from Washington State to Washington, DC to become President of the American Vintners Association (now called WineAmerica). He served as primary spokesperson for this trade association representing 700 wineries in 47 states, and represented interests of U.S. wineries to all levels of government. In addition to the continuing state-by-state legislative initiative to expand the network for direct shipment of wine to consumers, some of the initiatives Simon led were to establish the American Viticulture and Enology Research Network (AVERN), a national structure for research which helped achieve significant increases in federal funding; facilitation of an international trade negotiation effort with eight other "new world" wine producing country associations to help level the field for exports; and the creation of WineVision as a national platform to set industry-wide, long-term priorities.