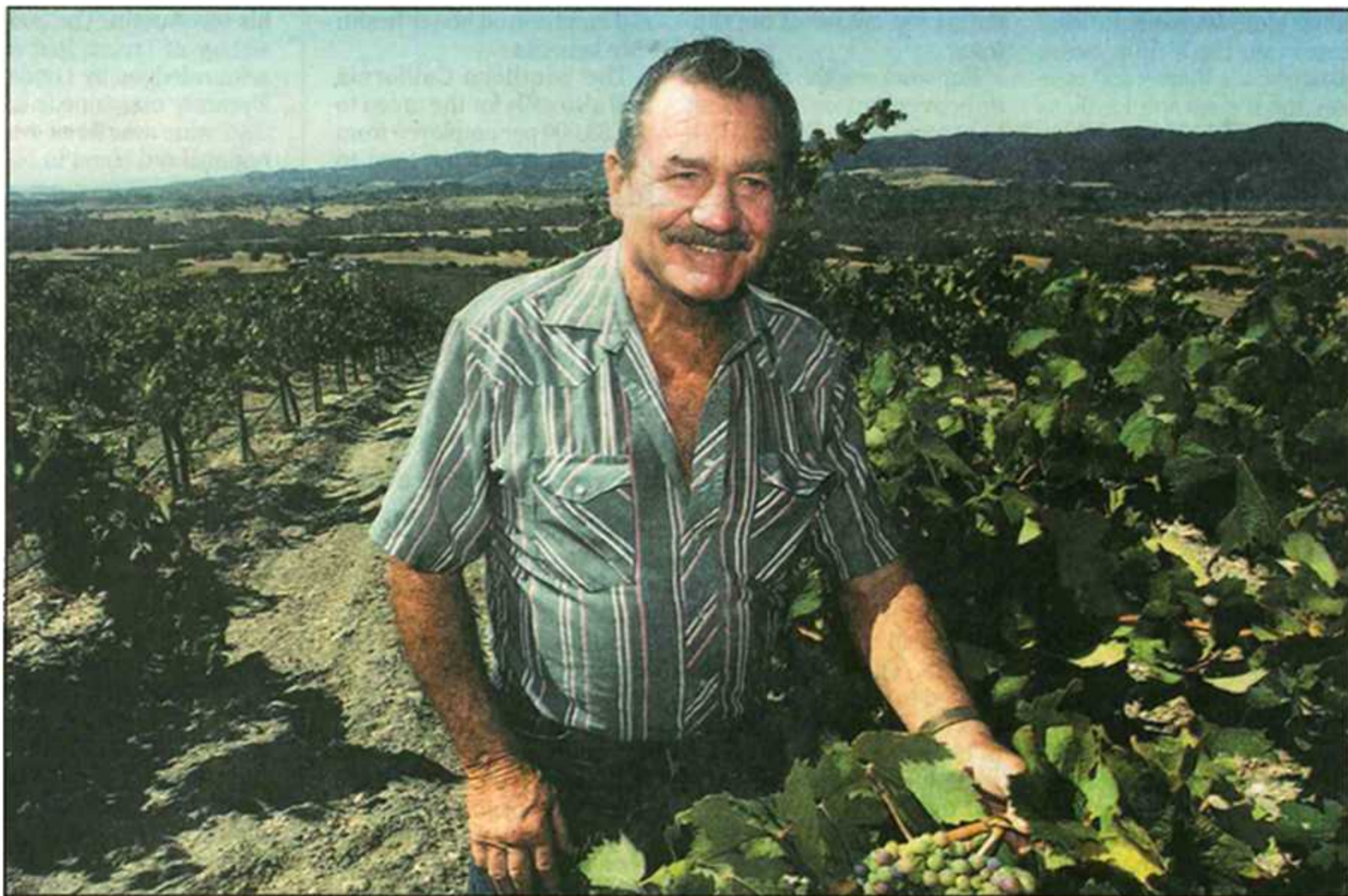


BIZ BUZZ: THE 2007 SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY WINE INDUSTRY AWARDS

Three to be honored at fair for influence on local wine



TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO BY LAURA DICKINSON

Richard Sauret will be recognized as this year's Wine Grape Grower of the Year tonight and again Aug. 3 at the Paso Robles Event Center. This is the second time Sauret, an Atascadero native, has won the award.

Stephan Asseo, Chuck Hope and Richard Sauret have helped elevate the region's prominence

Local winemakers and grape growers will recognize three peers tonight for their contributions to the increasing prominence of the local wine region at the 2007 San Luis Obispo County wine industry awards.

Stephan Asseo is Winemaker of the Year, Richard Sauret is Wine Grape Grower of the Year and Chuck Hope is Wine Industry Person of the Year.

The winners — the first of the 2007 California Mid-State Fair — will be honored at the fair's premiere party. The winners will be recognized again at the

Evening of Music and Wine in the Main Grandstand Arena on Aug. 3. They were nominated and voted on by the board of directors of the Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance, the San Luis Obispo Vintners Association and



Stephan Asseo



Chuck Hope

the Independent Grape Growers of the Paso Robles Area as well as past recipients of the award.

"This year's honorees are an amazing example of the diversity in the local wine community and whose individual endeavors have done much to further the indus-

try nationally and internationally," said Stacie Jacob, executive director of the Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance. "These individuals have had a significant impact on how the industry looks today."

Asseo, the owner and winemaker of L'Aventure Winery, who has drawn critical acclaim from national and international media for his wines, said the award is especially gratifying because it is "proof that I am well-integrated into the local population."

Asseo moved to Paso Robles in July 1998 from France. Jacob credits Asseo for furthering locally the con-

les in July 1998 from France.

Jacob credits Asseo for furthering locally the concept of high-density planting — a classic French technique that focuses on closer vine spacing but less fruit per vine — which "maximizes the use of land with better-quality grapes," she said.

Grape quality, not quantity, is also the emphasis of Sauret, a two-time winner of the grower award. An Atascadero native, Sauret said that his years of experience — he planted his first vineyard in 1952 — have proved to him that lower-yielding vines produce higher-quality grapes.

"I've grown quality all of my life," said Sauret, who grows primarily zinfandel grapes for premium wine growers. "I see that some growers are trying to get five and six tons of fruit per acre. I don't grow more than two or three."

Sauret, who is also the president of the Independent Grape Growers of the Paso Robles Area, is the only grower in the county to have vineyard-designated wines that have made Wine Spectator's coveted "Top 100" list, he said.

Hope, the owner of Hope Family Vineyard and one of the founders of the original Paso Robles Vintners and Growers Association, has seen much change since moving to the Central Coast from Bakersfield in 1978 and planting his first vineyard.

"When we first started farming here over 25 years ago, there was a lot of trial and error," Hope said. "Things are very different now in the vineyards. Luck has been replaced by a lot of skill, knowledge and experience."

Hope established Treana Winery in 1996, a 200,000-case operation that is run by his son Austin. The 2003 vintage of Treana Red was acknowledged by London's Decanter magazine in its 2007 wine awards as the top regional red blend in North America.

"It's extremely gratifying," Hope said, "when we travel nationally, and internationally for that matter, and we no longer get the question, 'Where's Paso Robles?'"

— Ermina Karim