

Charles "Monty" Stamp was loved, respected and admired by family, friends, professional peers, anyone with any connection to the grape and wine industry and everyone fortunate enough to have known or worked with him.

Monty was a farmer first - and he grew grapes. In the 1950's and 60's he participated in a variety of local, state and national plowing competitions, as well as competing in the World Plowing Matches in Northern Ireland. He won numerous awards, including the National Champion Plowing Founders Trophy in 1958 and the National Plowing Founders Award in 1971.

In 1963, with a few other grape growers, Monty helped form the NYS Wine and Grape Growers' Association. He served for 43 years as its Secretary/Treasurer, inspiring everyone with his vision of success for all through unity. He eventually served as President of Wine Grape Growers of America, and in 1987 received this national organization's Esteem Appreciation Award.

In the early 1980's, the largest producer of NY wine switched from buying NY grapes to importing California grapes. This was crisis time for NY grape growers and many were ready to throw in the towel, their market being essentially wiped out. Monty and his family, however, were not. Instead, in 1988 they chose to start making their own wine. In 1989 the doors of Lakewood Vineyard & Winery were opened for their first tastings. Instead of quitting, New York's grape growers followed the lead of Monty and a handful of other visionary grape growers, who were now becoming wine makers. Slowly but surely, small family-owned and operated wineries began popping up around the Finger Lakes region. This year, 2014, Lakewood Winery and the Stamp Family celebrate its 25th anniversary.

As a member of the Grape Growers Association, Monty often traveled to Albany & Washington to explain the needs of the growing wine industry and secure helpful legislation. As the industry started to grow so did the need for a marketing plan. The Association was able to secure a marketing order, a program which provided funding for research and promotion.

Due to an almost immediate court challenge, the Association was soon faced with a lengthy temporary loss of funding. It was Monty Stamp who stepped up and kept the program going by writing checks from his own personal account. Time and again, Monty proved to be the ultimate team player, demonstrating his strong conviction that "If we all work together we can all succeed." A handful of scattered wineries in the 60's began blossoming in the 90's into hundreds of successful wineries throughout the region, with the largest group of them overlooking our own Seneca Lake.

We owe a great debt to the visionary grape growers who, in the bleakest of moments, found a way to not just hold on, but to grow. Significant among those visionaries was Monty Stamp. His dedication and inspiration in promoting the wine grape industry has benefitted all of us. The financial health of our region is hitched to the wagon of tourism and wine industry growth. Monty was an integral part of and essential in keeping that wagon moving.

Our debt to Monty goes beyond his business efforts. He served his community well. He was a volunteer member of the Watkins fire department for 45 years, serving time as Fire Chief and teaching fire safety classes to elementary school children.

He loved working with children, and besides teaching fire safety, Monty was a Cub Scout leader and long time little league baseball coach. He served as Town of Reading Councilman and as Town Supervisor. It is worth noting that the Reading Town Hall is dedicated to and named after him.

Jim Trezise, current president of the NYS Wine and Grape Foundation and proud to have worked long, closely and well with Monty, chose these words to best describe him: "respect, honesty, integrity, compassion, commitment, dedication, passion, perseverance, thoughtfulness, incredible work ethics and complete selflessness." No one who knew Monty Stamp would ever disagree.