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CONTACT: Christine Lilienthal

707-522-5865

Sonoma County Honors the Best of the Best at its 2021 Vineyard Employee Recognition Celebration Acknowledging 49 Employees of the Month and Announcing Roberto Alvarez Flores as the Vineyard Employee of the year.

SANTA ROSA, Calif. (May 10, 2022) – The 350+ crowd was all smiles as vineyard employees, their families, and grape growers gathered for the 4th annual Employee Recognition Celebration at Saralee and Richards Barn at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds. The Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation’s Vineyard Employee Recognition program is one of the most innovative and prestigious awards in the wine grape industry. The awards, now in their fifth year, recognizes the accomplishments of vineyard employees who have helped to make Sonoma County a world-renowned wine region and a leader in sustainability. This past weekend, 49 women and men from Sonoma County who excel in farming were honored in front of family, friends, peers, winegrape growers and community leaders. Congressman Mike Thompson, who was unable to attend for the first time, sent a recorded video announcing this year’s Vineyard Employee of the Year recipient and stated he plans to deliver the Congressional Resolution in person later this month.

“This is one of our most loved programs where our vineyard employees are publicly honored in front of their families and peers. We greatly value our talented vineyard employees who excel in leadership, innovation, safety and conservation, and outstanding vineyard skills,” said Karissa Kruse, president of Sonoma County Winegrowers and the executive director of the Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation. She added, “these individuals work hard to make Sonoma County vineyards some of the best in the world.”

The recognition program began in 2018 to honor the men and women who excel in growing Sonoma County’s sustainable winegrapes. All employees working in Sonoma County agriculture for a vineyard owner, vineyard management company or winery are eligible for the award. Employers nominate Individuals each month throughout the year to recognize their various skills, achievements, and exceptional performance in different areas. Monthly themes include leadership, innovation, safety, frost protection, conservation, pruning, canopy management and harvest. Throughout the year, monthly winners receive gift cards as well as gain recognition in the local community via advertisements, social posts, and articles saluting their success.

At the annual event, award winners from 2021 were joined by their families, nominating vineyard managers, and the Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation’s Leadership Academy inaugural class to celebrate with a catered lunch and live music from a local Mariachi band. Santa Rosa City Council Member Tom Schwedhelm and Foundation Board Chairman Duff Bevill joined Karissa Kruse on stage to acknowledge and present honorees with their plaques and gift bags.

Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation officially announced Roberto Alvarez Flores, of Sangiacomo Family Vineyards, as the winner of its 2021 Vineyard Employee of the Year award.

“Roberto Alvarez is the modern-day superhero at Sangiacomo Family Vineyards,” says Steve Sangiacomo, Managing Partner. His coworkers view him as the Albert Einstein of their time. He is innovative and detailed. His nickname is ‘mil usos,’ meaning one who can do anything.”

Steve further said, “when we say our employees become part of our extended family, Roberto is the perfect example. he has worked for our family for over 22 years, evolving with the business every year. His father also worked for our family and today his son, Roberto Jr. works part time while attending Sonoma State University full time. Roberto is one of our top supervisors. His role allows him to teach and care for others. He is admired and respected by his team, leading them with compassion and clear direction.”

At the event Roberto was joined by his wife, children, and parents. His parents had arrived from Mexico the day prior for a scheduled family visit and were there to witness their son named as Vineyard Employee of the Year. It was an unforgettable moment for the family and all those in attendance. Afterwards, Roberto Jr., (Roberto’s oldest son) said, “I have always admired my father and wanted to follow in his footsteps. Today, he raised the step even higher. I could not be prouder.”

Roberto Sr. is involved in managing vineyard frost protection, irrigation management, annual vineyard development, harvest logistics and much more at Sangiacomo Family Vineyards. His reliability, consistent demeanor and critical thinking skills earned him the respect of his co-workers.

Steve Sangiacomo further explained, “As the business has grown, Roberto has expanded his learning and taken on new responsibilities. This is one of the proudest moments ever for our family business to have one of our employees, like Roberto, be recognized in this way.”

Today, Roberto lives with his wife, two daughters and two sons on the Sangiacomo Family Vineyards ranch. His son, Roberto Jr. is pursuing a wine business degree at Sonoma State University with the goal of working in viticulture and the wine community. His daughter Mayra will be graduating this year from Sonoma State University and will be attending USF to earn a Master’s Degree in Family Therapy.”

The event sponsors included: Ford Pro, Bacho, Redwood Credit Union and the Zenith Agribusiness.

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About the Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation:

The Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation (SCGGF) was first established in 2002 as a 501(c)(3) organization to help fund educational workshops in Spanish for agricultural employees. The foundation was relaunched in January of 2016 by local grape growers who recognized the opportunity to invest and work together to support vineyard employees and their families. SCGGF is focused on improving the lives

of Sonoma County's vineyard employees and their families, while ensuring Sonoma County remains a place where employees will continue to live, work, and thrive. Since its relaunch SCGGF has continuously proven it has a unique model of outreach and support, recognizing and relying on the trusted relationship that farmers have with their employees. SCGGF focuses on critical community areas such as healthcare, affordable housing, childcare, education, recovery and resiliency, and workforce development. The Foundation is managed by the Sonoma County Winegrowers with an 18-member board of directors comprised of agricultural leaders, vineyard and winery owners, and Sonoma County community leaders.

About the Sonoma County Grape Growers Leadership Academy

The Leadership Academy, a first-of-its-kind program for vineyard employees, is a pioneering program established in February 2022. The Leadership Academy focuses on advancing the skills needed for vineyard employees to enhance their current leadership skills and prepares them for leadership opportunities within their organization and community. The leadership training goes beyond farming skills. Class topics include, human resources, compliance, safety, communications, financial literacy, disaster preparedness, community resources, conflict resolution, managing people and much more.