

Many mourn a friend, who was a friend of Italian wine

by Nancy Pawloski

"Lou Iacucci was the foremost American purveyor of fine Italian wines and had the respect of the entire wine industry in this country and in Italy. He also had far more knowledge about the wines of Italy than any other American whom I know and was delighted to share his knowledge with all the rest of us. Lou not only was respected for his knowledge and position in wine retailing but he also happened to be a very nice human being. We all miss him. He is irreplaceable."

That comment by wine writer **Terry Robards**, an old friend of Iacucci, summed up the general reaction to the death of the New York area businessman and wine expert.

It seems that everyone knew Iacucci — journalists, importers, restaurateurs, wine producers and retailers — and they all remember the many little things he said or did that made him so special in many ways to his friends and colleagues in the wine business. Many people believe that the Italian wine trade will never be the same without him. He was a workaholic who devoted a large part of his life to Italian wines. His ability to know almost exactly what the customer wanted was unique. He thoroughly knew his wines and his business.

Iacucci loved Italian wines in particular and launched a personal campaign to educate the American wine drinker. His efforts over many years changed the drinking habits of many people. For that reason, he was given the Italian Wine & Food Institute's award for outstanding achievement in the field of wine last December. He was proud of the award and, in accepting it, said that it "does not belong to me. It belongs to all the Italian wine producers who made this possible."

The institute will commemorate him each year with the "Louis Iacucci Award," which will be presented to retailers who follow in his footsteps and distinguish themselves in the field of wine.

"His love for the fine wines of Italy was infectious," said **Harry Mariani**,

president of Banfi Vintners. "A moment's conversation with him would convince anyone of that. But Louis Iacucci was no advocate of the hard sell. He built a great business for Italian wines in this country through quiet, persistent and personal education. Year after year, he created a wider, more appreciative public, a singular effort that should prompt all wine lovers to mourn his passing."

To **Niki Singer**, the head of a well-known public relations firm, who knew him for many years, Lou was also a person who could open many doors in Italy. When Miss Singer was visiting outstanding restaurants in Italy where English was not spoken, she would at times show the proprietors a photograph of Lou with her children. "They almost always knew and loved Lou," she said, "and, seeing him with his arms around my children, they would welcome me with a warmth that went beyond language."

"A great loss"

For **Michael Aaron** of Sherry-Lehmann, "Lou was a great wine expert, a wonderful competitor, a great human being and one of the few of us who not only enjoyed selling wine but loved to drink it." However, Iacucci was not only selling and drinking wine but also educating the consumer. And "his extraordinary work in educating Americans about the wines of Italy had significant results in the American marketplace," as **Marvin Shanken**, editor and publisher of *The Wine Spectator*, observed. Shanken considered Iacucci a close friend and spoke of his death as a "great personal loss."

Similar remarks were made by **Philip di Belardino**, who observed that, "for Lou, Italian wine wasn't just a business. It was a mission. He really understood and loved the culture, the spirit, the greatness, the humor and the warmth of Italy and the Italian people. I know that time is supposed to heal everything but nothing will re-

place the void that Lou will leave as a pioneer, magnet and center of the fine Italian wine world of America."

Italian Trade Commissioner **Mario Castagna** praised Iacucci for "his strong support of quality" and for turning "what easily could have been just another retail wine shop into an oasis of quality and innovation in the world of Italian wine on these shores."

Marco Minasso of Kobrand described "Lou as the best friend of Italian premium-quality wines in the United States," while **Tony May**, head of the Italian Restaurant Group, said he considered Iacucci "a major force in promoting Italian wines," adding that "Iacucci single-handedly influenced and taught more restaurateurs about Italian wines than everybody else in America." For **Sirio Maccioni**, owner of *Le Cirque* restaurant in New York, "Lou's departure was a great loss for Italian wines."

"Lou had a great sense of style and great confidence in his own judgment," said **Harriet Lembeck**. "He had a great palate and a lot of practical ability and instinct in the market."

"Lou was such a vital, generous-souled person," remarked **Eunice Fried**, "and he loved wine not as an isolated subject but as part of the texture of life. I first met Lou and Lucy at a concert and afterward we spent a long evening with good food and good wine. In the following years, there were many such evenings of opera, concerts, food, wine and friends. That's the way I'll remember Lou, a man who embraced life so fully and gave so freely of himself that he will always live on in our memories."

The general attitude of loss was summed up by **Lucio Caputo**, president of the Italian Wine & Food Institute, who had known Iacucci for many years. "Lou was one of those people you knew you could count on when needed," Caputo said. "He was a unique human being, a great wine connoisseur and a strong supporter of Italian wines. His contributions to the wine world will never be forgotten. We will all miss him."