
A TRIBUTE TO KATHERINE DIMATTEO

OTA honored Katherine DiMatteo with its 2006 Organic Leadership Award for Outstanding Individual Achievement at its Annual Dinner and Dance May 8 at the InterContinental Hotel in Chicago. DiMatteo served as the first executive director for OTA from 1990, when it was the Organic Foods Production Association of North America (OFPANA), until March 1, 2006.

A tribute to DiMatteo, the dinner program included testimonials, a video of DiMatteo as she reflected on her years in the organic industry, and a song written in her honor sung by Lisa Bell of Crescendo Communications.

During the dinner, a slide show of testimonials in her honor and photos flashed on the screens behind the podium in the elegant ballroom. In addition to the award, DiMatteo received a keepsake book, wine labeled in her honor, a rose heart wreath, and fancy “go-go” boots to commemorate her stint as a “go-go” dancer in her youth. Appropriately, DiMatteo, who hadn’t known about the behind-the-scenes planning, gave an entertaining speech on “I learned all I needed to know to work at OTA as a go-go dancer.”

Although DiMatteo had known that the dinner was to be in her honor, the committee organizing the event kept secret the fact that she was to receive the award and that her family—parents, sister, children and granddaughters—would be there to share in the event. A visibly moved DiMatteo lovingly embraced her family, and seemed overwhelmed by all of the attention.

When DiMatteo started as the first executive director of OFPANA and used her personal credit to jump-start its business operations, the organization had approximately 200 members and a vision to establish unified guidelines for organic standards. U.S. organic sales at that time totaled approximately \$1 billion. OTA now boasts 1,700 members, covering the entire scope of organic agriculture and finished products, and 2006 organic sales are expected to surpass \$16.5 billion.

One of the greatest challenges DiMatteo met was to balance the needs of the organic business community and keep OTA as the umbrella for its diverse interests. As she facilitated the growth of OTA, everyone was welcome at the table. Her approach was to keep OTA out of the “organic versus conventional” and “small versus large” debates, focusing instead upon the positive benefits of organic to people and the planet. Under her guidance, OTA vigorously pursued its mission to promote and protect organic trade and strived to advance the greater good for all members. The trade association celebrated significant milestones under her stewardship, such as the implementation of the U.S. National Organic Program and the establishment of the All Things Organic™ Conference and Trade Show.

During her tenure at OTA, she became the principal spokesperson for the organic business community in the United States and a respected global leader. She is now recognized around the world for her efforts to build



DiMatteo, with granddaughter Asha

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consensus on organic standards and practices. Over the course of 16 years, her work with government, the media, the trade, and the public have helped place organic foods, fibers, and other products in the mainstream of American life.

Her contributions have not gone unnoticed. She has been previously honored with the natural products' industry Heart in Business Award, the National Nutritional Foods Association's Rachel Carson Environmental Achievement Award, a Natural Business Leadership Award from the Sixth Annual Natural Business Market Trends Conference, and New Hope Natural Media's 2006 Spirit of Organic Award. DiMatteo was also named one of *Self* magazine's "Food Influentials" and saluted as an Organic Industry Luminary by *Organic & Natural News*. Most recently, she has been selected to serve on the World Board of the International Federation of Organic

Agriculture Movements, and to continue as an independent board member of The Organic Center, which she helped to found.

In a statement of support for her nomination for the award, DiMatteo was described as "the glue that has held the organic industry together, and the energy that has fueled it." Others echoed that sentiment, describing her as a "tireless," "passionate," and "persevering" leader who has left OTA positioned for an even greater future.

Those paying tribute to DiMatteo noted their admiration of her personal integrity, passion, and willingness to share generously her

time and knowledge. Many members and staff consider her a mentor and role model. Nomination letters cited her genuine commitment to organic, along with her strong work ethic, as central to her success.

DiMatteo has left a great legacy at OTA, and there is simply no question that her accomplishments have earned her the association's highest honor. ■



Katherine DiMatteo (right) with Debra Boyle and Bill Knudsen