

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DECEMBER 21, 2006**

Contact:

**Jim Kuntz, Executive Director, Port of Walla Walla
(509) 525-3100 or jk@portwallawalla.com**

**Charla Skaggs, Media Coordinator, Washington Public Ports Association
(253) 426-9296 or cskaggs@washingtonports.org**

**PORT OF WALLA WALLA NAMED
WASHINGTON STATE PORT OF THE YEAR**

The Port of Walla Walla has been named Port of the Year by the Washington Public Ports Association. Incoming WPPA president Jack Thompson, Commissioner at the Port of Grays Harbor, made the announcement during the Association's annual meeting in Seattle.

"The Port of Walla Walla has shown remarkable leadership in enhancing the economic vitality of Southeastern Washington," said Commissioner Thompson. "The Railex Produce Distribution Center and the newly constructed airport wine incubator buildings are superb examples of how a port district can create economic growth," said Commissioner Thompson.

The Railex Produce Distribution Center is a \$58 million public/private investment that consolidates produce for shipping to the East Coast. Each week, 55 refrigerated rail cars loaded predominantly with Washington State produce are shipped to the East Coast in less than five days. It is then distributed to grocery stores up and down the eastern seaboard. Each week, the train will carry a load equal to 200 truck loads - approximately 8 million pounds of produce. In addition, the train uses 5 million less gallons of diesel fuel per year than trucks shipping the same amount of product. The Port, thanks in part to state and federal grants, was able to complete \$8.1 million of infrastructure improvements for the Railex project within a period of 18 months.

In an effort to support the burgeoning wine industry in Walla Walla, the Port constructed three incubator buildings for startup wineries. The incubator buildings provide reasonably priced production space for small, start-up wineries, improving their chances for long-term success.

The Port was also honored for its role in the Highway 12 Coalition's efforts to expand U.S. Highway 12 to four lanes from Walla Walla to the Tri-Cities. The project is essential for the safety and economic vitality of the region. Since 2001, the Coalition has obtained \$122 million in federal and state funding. Four out of the seven construction phases have been funded.

“I am pleased to congratulate the Port of Walla Walla on their selection as Port of the Year,” said Washington Governor Chris Gregoire. “The Port and the State of Washington have formed an outstanding partnership that has resulted in the completion of the Railex Produce Distribution Center and continued progress on the expansion of U.S. Highway 12 to four lanes.”

Governor Gregoire recently selected the Port of Walla Walla Railex project for the Governor’s Award for Best Practices in Economic Development.

“The Port is honored to have received this recognition,” said Port Commission President Paul Schneidmiller. “On behalf of the Port Commission, I would like to thank the citizens of Walla Walla County for being so supportive of our economic development initiatives.”

The Port of Walla Walla was founded in 1952 and is the lead economic development agency for Walla Walla County. The Port’s primary mission is the creation and retention of family wage jobs. The Port is governed by three elected commissioners - Paul Schneidmiller, Fred Bennett and Mike Fredrickson.

Each year, WPPA honors a WPPA member port for leadership and innovation in economic development efforts. The Association’s Executive Committee chooses the winning port from a pool of nominees.

The Washington Public Ports Association (WPPA) represents the state’s 75 port districts and provides a network through which ports share information and address issues on trade, transportation, economic development and the environment. Washington’s Port Districts offer a wide range of services including marine terminals, barge facilities, industrial development, marinas, airports, railroads and tourism promotion.