



napa valley vintners

Press Release

Auction Napa Valley Celebration Brings More than \$5.7 Million

2009's Dark Economy Fails to Dampen Event's High Spirits

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St Helena, CA--The crisis in the economy took a backseat to fundraising for charity at the Napa Valley Vintners' (NVV) 29th annual Auction Napa Valley (ANV) held this past weekend, raising more than \$5.7 million for local healthcare, youth and housing non-profit programs. Though no records were broken, the mood was upbeat and lively, in no small part due to the scores of surprises added to each venue.

"We are thrilled to be able to continue to support our local charities," said Janet Trefethen, whose family chaired the Auction. "No one expected to shatter any records, but the outpouring of generosity from our bidders, vintners and community is heartwarming. Every dollar raised this weekend is one more than we had before for these organizations that need help," she said.

The weekend began on Thursday, June 4th as masked horse riders held up the Napa Valley Wine Train where the previous year's top bidders, along with some of the region's most renowned vintners, were enjoying an evening excursion through the vines. No money was stolen from those held up at faux-gunpoint as the bandits wanted to ensure these bidders had money to spend at the Auction. They were taken "hostage" to a dinner prepared by Charles Phan of San Francisco's Slanted Door at the Trefethen estate.

What has become the consummate food and wine gathering of the year, Friday's Taste Napa Valley at Auction Napa Valley was held at the Robert Mondavi Winery in Oakville. Though rain threatened in the forecast, nearly 2,500 bidders and vintners enjoyed a picture-perfect day bidding on 120 barrels of wine futures in the spectacular To-Kalon Cellar in robust bidding that yielded nearly \$1.1 million. The top lot of the year was from Shafer Vineyards, bringing just over \$45,000 for the 10 cases.

Sixty of the region's top restaurants--including The French Laundry, Meadowood Napa Valley, Bounty Hunter, Rutherford Grill, Bardesonno, and Mustards Grill among scores of others and artisanal food purveyors were paired with 100 wineries on the lawn and amongst the vines. Guests were greeted upon arrival by a rollicking marching band, California Repercussions, which included wine industry professionals who ramped up the merriment. Bejeweled turbans topped vintners including Jack and Dolores Cakebread, Michaela Rodeno, and Bernard Portet, among others, who told the fortunes and futures of festival-goers.

Brian and Patricia Oliver, from near Washington, DC were first-time attendees this year and said, "What a fantastic weekend! Our kids are now in college so we can start visiting places we've always wanted to go to, and Napa Valley and Auction Napa Valley were on the list.

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We're definitely coming back. We enjoyed the wines and, meeting the vintners—they did a fabulous job. And we're excited that we won the Barrel auction lots we bid on."

"Taste Napa Valley is my favorite event of the year," said Deborah Russell Broman of Broman Cellars, continuing, "It showcases the best of the valley and brings the whole community together."

The global online E-Auction, which had been live since May 22nd, brought bidders from around the world, dueling in real-time with bidders on site at Robert Mondavi Winery during the final hours. This year 111 lots were offered, the top lot being an offering from Arietta Winery at \$13,500 for three 6-liter bottles of wine--the caveat, if the bid exceeded \$10,000, the winery owner Fritz Hatton, who is also a pianist and renowned ANV auctioneer, would pack up another case of wine and some sheet music and come to the winning bidder's home "for an evening of Ariettas." There were successful bidders from as far away as China who got in the action virtually, or as event organizers say, "Napa in your pajamas," in reference to the notion of people bidding at their homes across the country and around the world.

Full-package ticket holders filled time between the Friday daytime festival and the Saturday night Live Auction with intimate dinner parties and luncheons at vintners' homes and wineries for a taste of behind the scenes with America's top winemakers.

Under the tent at Meadowood Napa Valley for the Live Auction and dinner were acrobats, dancers, vintner antics and a live band that all helped long-time ANV auctioneer Fritz Hatton and new auctioneer Viveca Paulin Ferrell land gavels on 42 uber-lots at the crescendo of the weekend's excitement on Saturday. Here, lots of incredible wine and vintner-hosted excursions were offered to savvy wine lovers. The top lot of the night raised more than \$1 million raised from the offering by Antica Napa Valley-Antinori Family Wine Estate. A three-way bidding war ensued. A huddle with the Marchese Piero Antinori of the renowned Tuscan wine family and now a Napa Valley vintner as well, resulted in the Marchese tripling the lot so that all three parties could win, thereby increasing the income from the lot.

Doubling down also took place with the joint lot offered by Staglin Family Vineyards and HdV, where an on-site bidder and a phoned-in bid were combined to take the \$200,000 bid to \$400,000 for the sumptuous wine and travel package.

Fund a Need Continues to Pull Heartstrings...

Once again, paddles were raised with bidding beginning at \$500, then \$1000 and so on as bidders with nothing to win for their bid but their ability to support children's health programs. Before the bidding began, a group of local school-aged children who stayed up late to participate, took to the stage. One selected spokesperson, Yesenia, a 10-year-old attending Bel Aire Elementary, and who also attends the Boys & Girls Club of Napa Valley said, "My friends and I came here tonight from the Boys & Girls Clubs in Napa County to say thank you for coming to Auction Napa Valley. Every dollar raised helps Napa County non-profits, and every dollar raised at this year's Fund a Need will go directly to programs that support children's health and well-being. And that's US! So here's to you and all you do for our community!" The paddle raise brought in more than a half-million dollars.

Auction attendee Dr. Eugene Becker said, "Everyone is waiting for the economic climate to rebound, but the Napa Valley Vintners did well."

Event organizers decided last summer, long before the economy tumbled, not to have a headline celebrity open the Live Auction, as had been the case the past four years. Janet Trefethen, 2009 Auction chair said, "Our goal was to put more of our vintners in the spotlight

with some fun and playfulness throughout the evening. We set up a runway-style stage where vintners, visiting chefs, dancers and all kinds of what I call 'zingers and surprises' could take place—sort of a theater in the round.”

The program’s unofficial master of ceremonies was industry icon Kevin Zraly, author of “Windows on the World Wine Course,” who has a long, close relationship to the wines of Napa Valley. Zraly, who has hosted scores of wine auctions said, “Tonight was a perfect event: the energy in the tent was upbeat, the food was incredible, and the tone of the whole weekend was great. The vintners accomplished what they set out to do—raise a lot of money for charity—just a perfect weekend.”

Top Toques in the Kitchen

Supporting the fundraising by creating and preparing an outstanding dinner for the 800 guests under the tent at Meadowood were some of the country’s best chefs, including Trefethen family long-time friends Charlie Trotter of Charlie Trotter’s in Chicago; Dean Fearing of Fearing’s in Dallas; Joachim Splichal of Patina in Los Angeles; and Joseph Humphries of Murray Circle in Sausalito. Joining from the Napa Valley were Vincent Nattress and Christopher Kostow of Meadowood and Deanie Fox of Ubuntu.

Benefits Beyond the Charities

“It was important for our community overall that the Auction go on as planned—not only in helping to prop up everyone’s spirits in a down economy—maybe providing some celebration while doing good—but the weekend affects the valley in a broader sense as well, by keeping the hospitality industry that supports the auction-goers while they are here employed. From hotel workers to caterers, florists, bus drivers and retailers, the entire community benefits from the Auction and its guests,” said Paula Kornell, president of the NVV and ANV board of directors.

The 5 x 5 Community Promise

With the economy teetering on recession and the US at war for the past few years, the NVV board of directors acted to ensure the sustainability of Auction giving in troubling times. In 2007, the NVV made a \$25 million promise to the community—known as the 5 x 5 Community Promise, ensuring that the Auction would distribute a minimum of \$5 million to its beneficiaries each year over the next five years—no matter how much was raised each year by reaching into its endowment fund if needed. Over the first two years the Auction has been able to exceed that promise, giving \$16 million.

About ANV

Established by the NVV in 1981, ANV is the original and most successful charity wine auction in America, having given \$85 million since its inception for healthcare, youth development and affordable housing charities in Napa County. NVV is proud of its members’ contributions, raising desperately needed funds through ANV and for serving as the backbone of all other charity wine auctions across the U.S.

About the NVV

The Napa Valley Vintners is the non-profit trade association responsible for promoting and protecting the Napa Valley appellation as the premier winegrowing region. The organization celebrates its 65th anniversary this year. From seven founding members in 1944, today the association represents nearly 350 Napa Valley wineries and collectively is a leader in the world-wide wine industry. To learn more about our region and its legendary American wines, visit www.napavintners.com.