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Collective Napa Valley - Together Again Weekend raises \$3.8 million for youth mental health

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Cherie and Phillipe Melka with Ann and Mac MacQuoid at the Collective Napa Valley barrel auction.

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Gone is the Auction Napa Valley (ANV) as we once knew, raising astronomical funds for local charities in a single weekend. Welcome to the Collective Napa Valley's Together Again Weekend, a streamlined version of the highly successful ANV which debuted on June 2 and 3 and raised \$3.8 million from barrel and live auctions, plus the Fund-a-Bright Future campaign. The latter will stay open for online contribution through the end of this month. Proceeds will provide Napa Valley's youth much-needed access to mental health services.

The very first revamped auction weekend was indeed a coming-together celebration from the barrel auction held at Louis M. Martini Winery Friday and the family-style Together Again Live auction Saturday at Silver Oak Cellars along with a weekend filled with vintner-hosted luncheons and dinners.

The vibe was wine country elegant yet authentic and down-to-earth. And in true Napa style, there was plenty of delicious food reflecting local culinary skills, top-notch wines and gracious vintner hospitality.

The pivoting of ANV to a scaled-down version came about in the aftermath of the COVID-19 lockdown which gave many organizations pause to think about and reinvent fundraising events.

“In 2020, we canceled Auction Napa Valley due to the pandemic and spent the year dreaming up what we wanted to do next,” said Teresa Wall, senior director of communications at Napa Valley Vintners. After many discussions among community

members and vintners, the revamped Collective Napa Valley (CNV) was born in 2022. The new and innovative Collective Napa Valley is created as a year-round philanthropy program by Napa Valley Vintners, hosting three seasonal offerings, aiming at inclusivity and accessibility to the worldwide wine community drawn to Napa wines.

Indeed, the auction itself had gotten quite big and it was hard to maintain that level year after year, Wall noted. “It was a kind of steam roller that never stopped.”

The new version’s more manageable barrel and live auctions were handled by Sotheby’s. “We’re year two in our three-year agreement with Sotheby’s as our auction house for all of our endeavors with Napa Valley Vintners,” noted Wall. The auction house conducted last year’s barrel auction, which served as a jump-start for Napa’s return to fundraising.

From the excitement and enthusiasm witnessed last weekend at both barrel and live auction, it was clear that the truncated version is off to a good start.

While taking a wait-and-see attitude toward the redesigned Napa auction experience, Alpha Omega owners Robin and Michelle Baggett do see advantages to the new look. The auction “owns this weekend,” Robin commented, meaning the first weekend in June, but he likes the idea of spreading the experience out over an entire year.

“It keeps people engaged with smaller-scale experiences right through the year,” agreed Robin.

“A lot of big bidders have been supportive, and they really wanted to come back,” commented Beth Novak, who co-chaired the live auction with David Duncan, CEO of Silver Oak Cellars. “It’s a much smaller group of lots, but we’re just starting again so wanted to start like this and rebuild it,” said Novak.

Commenting on the family-style al fresco dining Novak expressed: “It’s more down to earth; this is who we are at least for me — my family has been here for 50 years at Spottswoode.”

The moveable feast attended by 200 at Silver Oak's live auction began with a reception under a tent, leading to one long community table flanked by vineyards. The 216-foot-long table was sectioned off with names of Napa's 16 appellations.

Napa's culinary pioneer Cindy Pawlcyn created a perfect summer menu — bowls of tomatoes, mozzarella, olives and arugula salad graced the tables alongside platters of salmon and beef tenderloin, all enhanced by an impressive lineup of Napa, reds, whites and Rosés.

After dinner, guests strolled over to an expansive garden appointed with a tasteful mélange of lounge furniture around the auction stage. As the sun set, the bidding warmed up to a night illuminated by a glowing saffron full moon.

Sotheby's auctioneer, the highly-charged Jacqueline Towers-Perkins, worked the intimate crowd and her seductive intimidation raised the evening's top lot to a cool \$500,000 by bidder Mary Miner for the Staglin Family's exotic eight-day South African journey to Singita Kruger National Forest and Cape Town.

Among the 10 lots, other high bids included St. Supery's package of 23 bottles of wine, a trip to Paris and two tickets to Chanel's 2024/25 Ready to Wear show (\$100,000); and the Spottswoode's Ultimate Napa Experience, loaded with four tickets to BottleRock, vineyard tours and magnums of wine. With two keen bidders, the \$280,000 bid was doubled.

There was active online participation as well with bids coming in fast and furious. The auction ended with a Fund-a-Bright Future as a dozen local high school students came on stage with some of them sharing their stories of mental health issues. "Fifteen percent [of youth] in this society have contemplated suicide," said one of the teens. "Bear that in mind and give generously."

The day before some 1,300 guests gathered around the festive marketplace on the grounds of Louis M. Martini winery where they enjoyed delectable bites curated by local chefs and restaurants and a wide selection of Napa wines, heavy on Rosés.

The barrel auction was in full swing in the barrel room with 80 winery lots predominantly of Cabernet Sauvignon and the majority of them were 2021 vintage, an outstanding vintage for most winemakers.

At Parallel Napa Valley, Phillippe Melka was among the few offering 2022 vintage which he called more approachable with a seductively softer tannin profile. But it's the 2021 which he said would be among his top five in the next 30 years. "It's very rare to have amazing structure with minerality, powerful but on its feet."

"It's one of those vintages that stands out" commented Shafer Vineyards winemaker Elias Fernandez. "After I'm dead and gone, it will be enjoyed for many years to come," he insisted, comparing it to Bordeaux's legendary 1961 vintage.

Several wineries hosted Friday night dinners, among them St. Supéry, Dana Estates, Freemark Abbey, Cakebread Cellars and Spottswoode

At Jean-Charles and Gina Gallo Boisset's eye-popping/art-filled Wappo Hill estate, a Midsummer Night's Dream-inspired soiree began with Boisset's Bees, a cocktail made with Rye whiskey produced in Calistoga.

"Napa Valley shouldn't be only about wine but distilleries also," insisted Jean-Charles Boisset who is restoring/repurposing the Calistoga Depot to a distillery. The evening fare began with escargots and oyster shooters and progressed to a French-inspired fare of L'Arpege egg, smoked salmon mille-feuille, Angus beef and ox cheek pithivier and cherry clafoutis — all paired with JCB selection of wines and finishing with Champagne.

Saturday's vineyard-themed luncheons were hosted by such wineries as Charles Krug, Robert Mondavi, Chimney Rock and Tres Sabores.

At Alpha Omega, winemaker Matt Brain led a blending session offering Cabernet Sauvignons from different appellations, followed by lunch hosted by owners Robin and Michelle Baggett.

The al fresco lakeside lunch at Alpha Omega's shaded gardens was a family-style spread of spring greens, ravioli, steak, Petrale sole and a dense chocolate block cake, a perfect pairing with the 2018 Era, a richly textured barrel-fermented Reserve Cabernet.

As the live auction came to a close, Napa pioneer Garen Staglin reflected: "I love the fact that we're bringing new energy and a new venue to Collective Napa Valley. Sometimes less is more. It's all about the mental health charities of Napa Valley. Every dollar we raise these charities will have. We're not in competition with anybody."

Indeed, Napa Valley's history of philanthropy continues to be unmatched as was evident at the successful Together Again Weekend, proof that Napa's vintners know how to stage a perfect fundraiser with generosity and sincere hospitality.

