

Inside the V Foundation's Annual Wine Country Bash

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HAUTE LIVING

BY KATIE SWEENEY | HAUTE SCENE, NEWS | AUGUST 8, 2017



Michael Franti high fives Mike Maples at the gala on Saturday night | Photo Credit: Bob McClenahan

Last week, Napa's elite got together with prominent members of the sports broadcasting, entertainment, investment, and medical communities to raise money for the **V Foundation for Cancer Research**. The 19th annual **Wine Celebration**, which was a three-day affair, raised almost \$9 million for the cause. The foundation was launched in 1993 by **ESPN** and the late **Jim Valvano**, a legendary college basketball coach, who lost his personal battle to cancer that same year. Since the Wine Celebration's inception, the event has helped fund 600 research programs at medical facilities across the country—including many Bay Area institutions such as **Stanford University** and the **St. Helena Hospital**. "Throughout this extraordinary weekend, hearts were opened by the stories shared, and we came away inspired and filled with hope by the progress being made in cancer research," **Julie Allegro**, founder and chair of the V Foundation Wine Celebration said. "We will remain 'shoulder to shoulder' in the fight against this disease. We won't stop until there are cures!"

The prelude to the Wine Celebration was a wildly exclusive event that took place on Wednesday, August 2 at the former **Mondavi Wappo Hill Estate**, the current home of wine's biggest power couple, **Jean Charles Boisset** and **Gina Gallo**. Dubbed the Gems of Napa, invitations to the event were auctioned off at last year's Wine Celebration. Attendees all bid \$5K for a ticket to the dinner, which included an intimate dinner and **Rubin Singer** fashion show. Singer, who has dressed everyone from **Beyonce** to **Sharon Stone**, created custom dresses for the "Gems of Napa," a select group of female winemakers who were pouring their wines at the event. The Gems were **Michelle Baggett** of **Alpha Omega Winery**, **Heidi Barrett** of **La Sirena** and **Amuse Bouche**, **Blakesley Chappellet** of **Chappellet Vineyard**, **Amy Marks Dornbusch** of **Gemstone Vineyard**, **Gina Gallo** of **Louis Martini** and **Orin Swift**, **Helen Keplinger** of **Keplinger**, and **Beth Nickel** of **Far Niente** and **Nickel and Nickel**. Stylist **Victoria Hitchcock** styled the looks for the vintners at this once in-a-lifetime dinner. Guests dined, alongside the indoor pool, on a meal of butter-poached lobster, truffled squab breast, foie gras, and milk chocolate mousse. The menu was created by Chef **Victor Scargle** and the culinary team of **Atelier Fine Catering**.



The Gems of Napa, from left to right: Blakesley Chappellet, Michelle Baggett, Amy Marks Dornbusch, Rubin Singer, Beth Nickel, Heidi Barrett, Helen Keplinger, and Gina Gallo | Photo Credit: Alexander Rubin



Atmosphere at Rock the V party | Photo Credit: Art & Clarity

On Thursday, the official celebration festivities started with a Hall of Fame luncheon at Far Niente Winery hosted by Beth Beth Nickel, **Dirk Hampson** and **Larry Maguire**. That evening, several wineries hosted intimate dinners, including Alpha Omega Winery, hosted by proprietors **Robin** and Michelle Baggett; **Davis Estates**, hosted by proprietors **Mike** and **Sandy Davis**; **Odette Estate**, hosted by partner and general manager **John Conover**; and **Sinegal Estate**, hosted by proprietor **David Sinegal**. On Friday, there was another luncheon hosted at Chappellet Vineyard. That night was the popular Rock the V party at the Pavilion at the **Vintage Estates** in Yountville. Local restaurants and wineries were on hand offering bites and pours with a custom-barrel auction where guests bid on one-of-a-kind cases. Rock the V had an **Andy Warhol** theme and a performance by the beloved cover band, **Tainted Love**. The highlight of the night was when **Mike "Coach K" Krzyzewski**, of **Duke University** and a V Foundation Board Member, took the stage with Allegro and musician **Michael Franti** to announce **Constellation Brands'** \$1.25 million donation to the foundation.

On Saturday morning, the foundation hosted a free public symposium where prominent physicians and research scientists presented the most current advances and discoveries in relation to their cancer. The Super Silent Auction and Marketplace at **Groezinger Estate** followed the symposium.

The main event, the gala dinner and live auction, took place on Saturday night at Nickel & Nickel. Auctioneer John Curley with the assistance of Tony Award winner Christian Hoff, lead the bidding of 32 live auction lots plus a Fund-A-Need. Auction lots included an array of VIP experiences like tickets to the Grammys, an 11-course dinner at Single Thread restaurant in Healdsburg, and a weekend in Austin with Tito Beveridge of Tito’s Vodka. The theme for this year’s gala “Heart, Mind, Soul,” was taken from Valvano’s 1993 speech at the inaugural ESPY awards: “Cancer can take away all my physical abilities. It cannot touch my mind, it cannot touch my heart and it cannot touch my soul. And those three things are going to carry on forever.” Guest speaker George Bodenheimer, the retired president and chairman of ESPN, welcomed guests by quoting Valvano. “Tonight, our tent is lled to the brim with passionate, committed people, who are making a difference in the lives of others,” he said. “The important point that brings us together is that we are here to put an end to cancer. Period. We are here because we believe in the work of this Foundation and its motto: “Don’t Give Up . . . Don’t Ever Give Up!”



Mike “Coach K” Krzyzewski, Duke University’s head men’s basketball coach and V Foundation board member | Photo Credit: Bob McClenahan



Valerie Garjiulo, of Garjiulo Vineyards, shakes the hands of the winners of her auction lot | Photo Credit: Bob McClenahan



The Gems of Napa, from left to right: Blakesley Chappellet, Michelle Baggett, Amy Marks Dornbusch, Rubin Singer, Beth Nickel, Heidi Barrett, Helen Keplinger, and Gina Gallo | Photo Credit: Alexander Rubin