

BY KELLY E. CARTER

Haute AMBASSADOR *Wine Country*



Kelly E. Carter is the director of communications at Alpha Omega winery on Napa Valley's Rutherford Bench. The former editor of "Haute Living San Francisco" previously enjoyed a lengthy, award-winning career in journalism writing about sports, entertainment, and luxury lifestyles for various media outlets. Kelly co-authored New York Times bestseller "Come to Win: Business Leaders, Artists, Doctors, and Other Visionaries on How Sports Can Help You Top Your Profession" with Venus Williams and penned "The Dog Lover's Guide to Travel" for National Geographic Books. She has traveled to more than 40 countries and territories on six continents and called Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, and Italy home. Visit Kelly at: www.kellyecarter.com



Wayne Kocourek, Nan Kocourek, Michelle Baggett, and Robin Baggett at Alpha Omega for V Foundation Wine Celebration

GOING ONCE, GOING TWICE, SOLD!

Napa Valley Virtual Fundraisers Play Big on the Small Screen

In these days of everything going virtual, I wondered, how could the thrill of bidding on luxurious, live auction lots in an electrified room full of wine-fueled auction-goers be replicated on Smart TV screens when charitable supporters are sheltering-in-place alone or with immediate family? I found out when I tuned in to watch what turned out to be spectacularly produced and successful virtual fundraisers put on recently by a couple of my favorite Napa Valley charities.

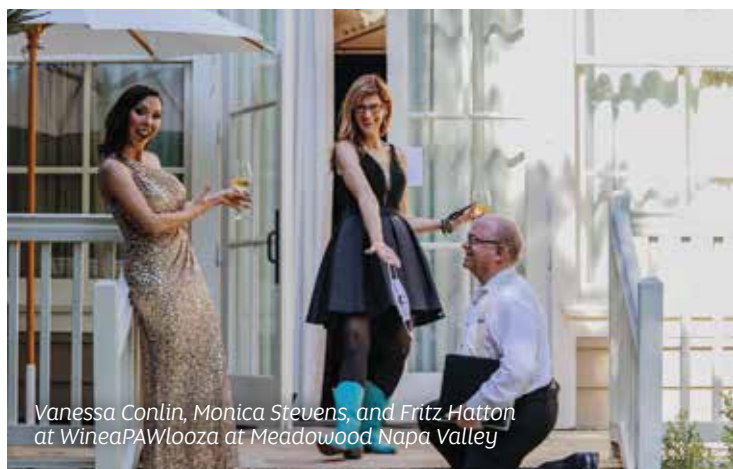
The V Foundation Wine Celebration, which in its 21 years had already raised more than \$115 million for the V Foundation for Cancer Research, brilliantly offered a month-long, virtual series, Momentum of Cancer Research: Vintner Grant Honoree Edition, to help build excitement and its coffers leading up to its 22nd annual event on August 8, Momentum 2.0.

Alpha Omega Vintners Robin and Michelle Baggett, the 2011 Vintner Grant honorees, were among the Vintner Grant honorees to host live virtual wine tasting experiences benefiting the Wine Celebration. Via Zoom and Facebook Live on July 18, teary-eyed Alpha Omega wine lovers watched and listened to a clip of the late coach Jim Valvano's legendary speech at the 1993 ESPYs. In between four wines being tasted and discussed, NFL great Joe Theismann virtually popped in from his Memphis home to banter with the Baggetts and provide inspirational words to participants, as did Olympic gold medalist figure skater Scott Hamilton from his residence and renowned immunologist Dr. Olja Finn, a member of the V Foundation Scientific Advisory Committee, from hers. Singer Andy Grammer entertained for the finale.

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V Foundation Wine Celebration
virtual auction viewing at Alpha Omega



Vanessa Conlin, Monica Stevens, and Fritz Hatton
at WineaPAWllooza at Meadowood Napa Valley



Screenshot of Young People's Chorus of
New York City performing "Give Us Hope"



Maria Manetti Shrem, Jan Shrem, Karen Walker, Rick Walker,
Gina Gallo, and Jean-Charles Boisset watch Festival Napa
Valley's One Night, Many Voices at Solage

That was just the beginning of the Wine Celebration. On August 8, ABC aired an inspirational, hour-long television special, *V for Victory*. Then, on YouTube, Duke Coach Mike Krzyzewski hosted *Momentum 2.0* live from Raleigh, North Carolina with assistance from college basketball analyst Jay Bilas and auctioneer John Curley, also in Raleigh, and ESPN SportsCenter anchor Sage Steele in Connecticut.

Cameras popped over to Alpha Omega, the Napa Valley host site and where the Baggetts hosted four couples for a virtual auction viewing on large screen TVs set up outside two beautifully decorated cabanas on the Vineyard Terrace. Viewers from around the country and abroad watched as one couple at Alpha Omega, longtime V Foundation Wine Celebration supporters Wayne and Nan Kocourek, kicked off the Fund-a-Need lot with a \$1 million challenge donation, which was met—and more. A collaboration between Gemstone Vineyard and Stephen Silver Fine Jewelry featuring a ruby encrusted 3L of 2019 Gemstone Ruby Barrel Selection, one of six one-of-a-kind auction lots, was the top lot at \$300,000 and helped the virtual event raise more than \$3.6 million for cancer research. The Wine Celebration's auction is always the most emotional fundraiser I attend in Napa, and watching it virtually was a reminder not to forget about the need for cancer research during this COVID-19 pandemic.

On July 5, I tuned to SOMMTV to watch Jameson Humane's (formerly known as Jameson Animal Rescue Ranch) signature fundraising event, WineaPAWllooza 2020: 'PAWllooza in Place. Kudos to Jameson founders Monica and David Stevens for bringing in producers Jason and Christine Wise for this virtual fundraiser, which raised more than \$1 million and also had viewers in other countries watch. Philanthropic vintners promoted their fabulous

auction lots through beautifully shot videos that captured the people and stories behind the wine. With cowbells ringing, auctioneer Fritz Hatton, who joined the Stevens at Meadowood Napa Valley to co-host along with Master of Wine Vanessa Conlin, showed that he doesn't need to be inside a tent packed with people brandishing numbered paddles to start a bidding war. Lots included a 3L vertical of 1995, 1996, and 1997 Screaming Eagle and the highly coveted Beckstoffer Bonanza, a tribute to honorary event chairs Andy and Betty Beckstoffer who are celebrating the 50th anniversary of their Beckstoffer Vineyards this year. That lot featured 16 jeroboams (3L) from legendary Beckstoffer Vineyards, donated by Alpha Omega, Alejandro Bulgheroni, TOR, and more.

As soon as WineaPAWllooza ended, I switched to YouTube to watch Festival Napa Valley present *One Night, Many Voices*, a free concert featuring festival favorites Joshua Bell with soprano Larisa Martínez, tenor Michael Fabiano, soprano Nadine Sierra, pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet, and the sensational Young People's Chorus of New York City, whose performance of "Give Us Hope" was moving and memorable. The concert culminated with a swinging jazz performance by pianist Aldo López-Gavilán and his band—direct from Havana, Cuba. Although Festival Napa Valley postponed its 15th anniversary season to 2021, its virtual programs have been a wonderful way to keep supporters engaged.

As much as I miss clinking glasses with everyone at live Napa Valley events and seeing what everyone is wearing, one of the most positive aspects of virtual fundraisers is knowing nonprofits can spread their message to a lot more people than just those who can attend their annual live events. Now that's something to raise a glass to. Cheers!

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