Naples Winter Wine Festival Rings in 2018 with $15 Million for Charity

Naples Children & Education Foundation lands big gift thanks to winemakers, chefs and donors

Photo by: Louis Verne

Bidders packed the tent at the Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort in Naples for this year's event.

Victoria Sadosky
Posted: January 30, 2018

The Naples Winter Wine Festival returned to the Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort in Naples, Fla., Jan. 26–28, for a charitable weekend benefiting the Naples Children & Education Foundation and the children of Collier County. The live auction raised more than $12.8 million (slightly below last year's $13.4 million sum), bringing this year's total take to $15.15 million. Debuting in 2001, the annual charity wine auction event has collected $176 million to date.

"The NWWF continues to provide patrons with unique travel experiences, rare wine lots, and luxury goods, all thanks to our generous donors, vintners and chefs," Susie McCurry, the event's 2018 co-chair, told Wine Spectator via email. "Their time and the fruits of their labors helped make this year's festival an overwhelming success."

The weekend kicked off Jan. 25 with the 2018 Vintner Cellar Luncheon, hosted by Opus One CEO David Pearson. Guests had the chance to partake in a master class 10-vintage vertical tasting from the winery, spanning from 2014 to 1980.

"I was completely thrilled with the entire experience from start to finish. It's rare for us to do a 10-vintage tasting anywhere, and the atmosphere of this tasting allowed me to present the wines in-depth," Pearson said. "We have a long story, and to understand our wines today, it's really helpful to know where we came from."

McCurry noted that 40 percent of this year's guests at the live auction on Jan. 27 were first-time attendees. Of the 61 live lots, a 2018 Rolls Royce Phantom claimed the highest bid of the night, at $780,000. The lot included a selection of Alpha Omega wines, a two-night stay at Meadowood resort and the opportunity to participate in judging for Robb Report's Car of the Year. Two other car lots—a 2018 McLaren 720S and a 2019 Bentley Continental GT—sold for $650,000 and $520,000, respectively.

As 2018's honored vintners, Kary and David Duncan of Silver Oak and Twomey Cellars offered another top-selling lot, which included a private dinner for the winner and two dozen of their friends hosted by the Duncan Family, as well as a live piano performance by Chuck Leavell of the Allman Brothers Band and the Rolling Stones. "Over the last several years, Kary and I have seen firsthand how the Naples Winter Wine Festival has made a profound impact on the underserved children of Collier County," said David Duncan, CEO of Silver Oak and Twomey and 2018 co-chair, via email. At $320,000, the lot also included a balthazar, an imperial and a double magnum of 2013 Silver Oak Cellars Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon signed by Duncan, as well as a Martin X Series OMCXAE Black Guitar signed by Leavell and Duncan.

Other lots offered exclusive experiences farther afield—a 10-day trip to South Africa for two couples alongside Shari and Garen Staglin of Staglin Family Vineyard was sold for $520,000. In addition to private safaris and tastings, the lot included 12 bottles of Staglin Family Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon ranging from 2009 to 2014.

Big players from the culinary world were also present. This year's chef de cuisine was chef Gary Danko of Restaurant Gary Danko in San Francisco, a Wine Spectator Grand Award winner, and other top chefs in attendance included Jonathan Waxman of Barbuto and Jams, and Dominique Crenn of Best of Award of Excellence winner Atelier Crenn.

The excitement did not ebb as the evening waned. A Fund-a-Need lot raised more than $2.3 million for underserved children in need of oral healthcare and hunger relief.

"What happens under that tent is a crazy thing," Pearson said. "There's a joy for life, there's a joy for life where wine has a place, there's a joy of doing something that helps people, and it's just contagious, it's infectious, it's wonderful."