

## Wine auction raises \$14.3 million

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J.L. Sousa/Register

Confetti rains down on a successful high bidder at Auction Napa Valley at Meadowood Napa Valley on Saturday.

This year's 36th annual Auction Napa Valley raised \$14.3 million for community health and children's education nonprofits. Last year the event sponsored by the trade organization the Napa Valley Vintners raised \$15.8 million.

Over the course of four days, guests experienced vintner-hosted dinners and parties, the Napa Valley Barrel Auction at the Robert Mondavi Winery held on Friday, and the live auction held Saturday at Meadowood Napa Valley. The weekend ended with a Sunday brunch.

"Thrilled doesn't begin to describe how pleased we are with the results of this weekend's Auction Napa Valley," said Emma Swain on Sunday afternoon. Swain, who is chair of the Napa Valley Vintners board of directors and CEO of St. Supery Estate Vineyards & Winery, added, "We are immensely grateful to our vintners, guests and volunteers for their amazing outpouring of generosity that will directly benefit so many of our neighbors in need."

For the live auction on Saturday afternoon, nearly 900 guests were in the large, white tent at Meadowood, where an estimated more than \$10 million was raised.

The weather was warm and the bidding was hot and heavy. After raising \$3.82 million after selling 11 lots in the first 47 minutes, auctioneers Fritz Hatton and Ursula Hermacinski had the crowd whipped into a frenzy.

At the end of the nearly three-hour auction, the top 10 lots had raised \$7.67 million.

“Helter-skelter,” was the assessment of veteran auction reporter L. Pierce Carson, who has attended every auction since the beginning in 1981.

Traditionally, the first lot is always donated by the host family. The lot by the Huneeus family, included 21 bottles of wine, including one 12 liter of 2014 Quintessa, dinner and entertainment for 20 at the Rutherford winery. It sold for \$170,000, was doubled and then matched for a total of \$680,000.

The second lot included a huge “Goliath” bottle (27 liters) of 2005 Favia Erickson Cabernet Sauvignon, cooking classes, blending sessions and dinner for a large group of people. It sold for \$110,000.

During one of the lots, Hatton kept urging the crowd: “Keep your paddles up” during bidding for a joint Chateau Montelena and Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars lot that commemorated the 1976 Judgment of Paris lot. It included the opening of a 1973 SLV Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon and 1973 Chateau Montelena Winery Chardonnay. It sold for \$110,000.

According to Trevor Terril, media and communications coordinator for Chateau Montelena, the winery has 10 bottles of the rare chardonnay left. He estimated there may be two cases of the Stag’s Leap Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon left. “We’re offering a piece of history,” Terril said on Friday.

Rep. Mike Thompson, D-St. Helena, was at Meadowood Saturday afternoon, chatting with vintners Bo and Heidi Barrett of Chateau Montelena. Thompson said he was at Thursday’s magnum party, held at St. Helena’s Tra Vigne, when he had “a little bit” of the award-winning 1973 Stag’s Leap Cabernet Sauvignon. He said it “was an honor to taste it.”

There was applause and a standing ovation as Hatton introduced Margrit Mondavi and led the crowd in singing “She’s a Wonderful Lady” to the grand dame. Hatton added, “Happy 50th, Mondavi Winery,” as the Robert Mondavi Winery lot went before the paddle.

Mondavi told Hatton it would be the only time the “party of a lifetime” would be offered. The “50 Years, 50 Guests, 50 Bottles” sold for \$520,000 to Ron and Teri Kuhn from Pillar Rock Vineyards.

Later in the auction, 100 bidders spent \$2.1 million in the “Fund-a-Need lot. Barbara Banke of Jackson Family Wines was the top donor, contributing \$500,000.

The 34th lot was a South African safari donated by the Staglin Family, which raised \$1.05 million, the top lot of the auction.

Other top lots were:

“True Warriors of Wine,” donated by Amuse Bouche and Tusk Estates, which sold for \$520,000 and then matched for a total of \$1.04 million;

“A Night Full of Stars,” a buy-a-spot lot donated by Opus One, which raised \$660,000;

“Etched into the Hillside,” donated by Harlan Estate, which sold for \$500,000.

Robin and Michelle Baggett, owners of Alpha-Omega Winery, were both donors and bidders, having spent and donated an estimated \$400,000.

Michelle said, “Robin and I have been participating in this auction for nine years; we are 10 years old now, and we knew coming into the valley how amazing our peers and mentors are about charitable contributions. That’s really something we’ve always believed in.”

The Baggetts were involved in three lots: their own lot, “A World of Wonder,” a 14-night voyage on a mega yacht, which sold for \$230,000; the Rutherford Dust Society lot (Michelle is president of the organization), which included 38 bottles of wine and sold for \$120,000; and the evening with Michel Rolland and dinners at Alpha Omega and in France, which sold for \$110,000.

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Robin said he and his wife bid on three auction lots. “I gotta look at it, I just gave back to the community. Maybe I’ll have some fun doing it,” he said.

After the auction, everyone dined at an al fresco dinner prepared by South American chef Francis Mallmann. He and his crew tended to the six fire pits dug into the manicured fairway at Meadowood Napa Valley and cooked racks of ribeye and whole chickens hung over flames, while root vegetables cooked underground in firepits lined with hot rocks and grapevine leaves.

The fires were started at 4 a.m., some 15 hours before dinner was served. According to one of the crew, they had burned some three cords of oak by the time the auction began.

Honorary chair of this year’s event was Augustin F. Huneus, whose father held the same title for the 1996 auction. “We showed our guests how much fun it is to be part of Auction Napa Valley,” he said.

After dinner, Huneus thanked everyone involved in the auction and revived a tradition started by Louis Martini in 1981 when he passed a golden paddle to the next auction chair. Huneus passed it to Eleanor Coppola representing Inglenook Winery.

The event included barrel auction lots (Melka Wines sold for \$62,100 and Shafer Vineyards for \$60,050); Big Board lots (Lail Vineyards and Vineyard 29 sold for \$37,800 and Darioush sold for \$27,000); and E-Auction lots (Grgich Hills Estate sold for \$17,550, Sherwin Family Vineyards, \$11,550.)

To date, the Napa Valley Vintners has given more than \$150 million in ANV proceeds to Napa County nonpro 100,000 clients annually.

Top live auction lots

Fund-a-Need, \$2.1 million

Staglin Family Vineyards, \$1.05 million

Amuse Bouche, Tusk Estates, \$1.04 million

Quintessa, \$680,000

Opus One, \$660,000

Robert Mondavi Winery, \$520,000

Harlan Estate, \$500,000

Scarecrow Wine, \$440,000

Blackbird Vineyards, Bvlgari, \$360,000

Antica Napa Valley - Antinori Family Wine Estate, \$320,000