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# How California wildfires could impact vintners scheduled to participate in SWFL wine festivals

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(Photo: Katie Klann/Naples Daily News)

Organizers of two Southwest Florida wine festivals are on high alert as many of the vintners signed up for the charity events next year come from Northern California where [wildfires are raging](http://story/news/2017/10/10/napa-fires-continue-burn/748931001/) ([/story/news/2017/10/10/napa-fires-continue-burn/748931001/](http://story/news/2017/10/10/napa-fires-continue-burn/748931001/)).

"We've been closely following the news of the wildfires in Napa, Sonoma, and the surrounding counties, and our prayers are with those affected," said Maria Jimenez-Lara, the Naples Winter Wine Festival's CEO, in a statement.



Maria Jimenez-Lara CEO Naples Children & Education Foundation (Photo: File)

Elaine Hawkins, president of SWFL Children's Charities and co-chairwoman for its next wine and food fest, said the No. 1 concern is the vintners' safety, not whether they can still make it to next year's event.

"We have been in touch with a lot of them," she said. "We have developed relationships. We are personal friends with a lot of these vintners and we are just horrified by the fires and what is happening to them. After having gone through our own little trauma of Irma we understand how devastating it can be."

The next [Southwest Florida Wine & Food Fest](http://swflwinefest.org) (<http://swflwinefest.org>) isn't until March, so that would seemingly leave time to make changes to participating vintners if necessary.

Likewise, the [Naples Winter Wine Festival](http://swflwinefest.org) (<http://swflwinefest.org>), hosted by the Naples Children & Education Foundation, is still months away. It won't be held again until January.

California vintners are great supporters of the two events, which [annually raise millions of dollars](http://story/entertainment/festivals/wine/2017/01/28/17th-annual-auction-raised-estimated-138-million-naples-children-education-foundation/96986764/) ([/story/entertainment/festivals/wine/2017/01/28/17th-annual-auction-raised-estimated-138-million-naples-children-education-foundation/96986764/](http://story/entertainment/festivals/wine/2017/01/28/17th-annual-auction-raised-estimated-138-million-naples-children-education-foundation/96986764/)) to help local children in need.

"We have no idea how it will affect our event in March. Hopefully everyone will survive this and come through it," Hawkins said. "We just won't know for a while."

The cause of the fires remains under investigation. The fires have killed more than 30 people and hundreds are still missing. Thousands of ~~homes and businesses~~ <sup>homes</sup> — have burned to the ground.

At least two wineries have burned ([/story/news/2017/10/09/napa-sonoma-wine-country-charred-devastating-wildfires/748160001/](http://story/news/2017/10/09/napa-sonoma-wine-country-charred-devastating-wildfires/748160001/)), while others have been forced to close on and off this week because of a series of wildfires that erupted Sunday night.

2017 Naples Winter Wine Festival

station

Fullscreen



"It's just heartbreaking to know that places we have visited are burning and people we know are losing homes," Hawkins said. "Their employees are losing their homes. It's just a crazy thing."

California fires map: How the deadly wildfires are spreading

More than a dozen vintners from Northern California are signed up for next year's wine and food fest.

"If they haven't been absolutely affected by the fire they are taking precautions to get them and their staff out of the way of the fires," Hawkins said. "It seems like that fire isn't stoppable at this point."

The lineup for the Naples festival's intimate dinners, held in private homes and special settings, includes 16 vintners from California. The vintners hail from Oakville, Sonoma, Napa, St. Helena, Lompoc, Yountville, Rutherford and Santa Rosa.

Terry and Bob Edwards, trustees for the Naples Children & Education Foundation, haven't heard any news about Bond, the chosen winery for their vintner dinner.

Bond, founded by H. William Harlan, is located in Napa. Representatives for the winery could not immediately be reached for comment.

"I'm sure it is very chaotic at present," Terry said in an email.

Part-time Naples resident and fellow trustee Jeff Gargiulo, who will host a dinner and participate as a vintner in next year's wine festival, said he doesn't think the wildfires will affect the event or the wine served. The wine that comes from this year's crop won't be ready in January anyway — and the damage to wineries may not be as great as feared thanks to the tireless efforts of the firefighters, he said.

His family's winery, Gargiulo Vineyards, is in Oakville, away from the fires.

"They've been close," he said. "We've seen them, but we haven't had any fires."



Ann Welsh McMulty dances after winning Lot 54 after bidding \$220,000 during the 2017 "Bright Sunshiny Day" Auction at the Naples Winter Wine Festival on Saturday, January 28, 2017, at the The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort in North Naples. Lot 54, "Say Hi To Heidi," included VIP access to the finale of the show "Project Runway." (Photo: Katie Klann/Naples Daily News)

Fortune is keeping a [running list \(http://fortune.com/2017/10/11/napa-winerries-damaged-by-fires/\)](http://fortune.com/2017/10/11/napa-winerries-damaged-by-fires/) of wineries that have been impacted. Darioush in Napa County is the only winery on Fortune's list that's signed up to participate in a vintner dinner for the Naples wine festival in 2018. The business magazine reported "the Stag's Leap District winery suffered some landscape and vineyard damage, but said the winery structure was sound, despite some reports that were more dire."

Two of the most severely damaged vintners are Signorello in Napa and Paradise Ridge in Sonoma, which both lost their wineries after they were engulfed in flames, but neither are in the Naples wine festival's vintner dinner lineup.

Part-time Naples residents Teri and Ron Kuhn, honorary trustees of the Naples Children & Education Foundation, own a 40-acre vineyard Pillar Rock below the Atlas Peak mountain range in California. While a fire stretched down the hillside where they produce their Cabernet Sauvignon, their grapes luckily had already been harvested and firefighters managed to stop the fire by digging a trench before it reached their property, which includes their home, a guest house and their vineyard.

"We lucked out," she said. "Just as the fire was spreading toward us, the wind changed directions."

She and her husband, Ron, are staying at their home in Illinois. She said other vintners in her area haven't been as lucky.

"It's really, really devastated the entire valley by us," Kuhn said. "We still can't get into our house there. It's evacuated."



2017 Naples Winter Wine Festival chairs, clockwise from left couple: Jeff Gargiulo and Valerie Boyd; Brian and Denise Cobb; Debra and Bill Cary; and Simone and Scott Lutgert. (Photo by/ courtesy of Louis Venne) (Photo: Louis Venne)

The couple also owns a home in Naples, which was damaged by Hurricane Irma. They have been involved in the Naples wine festival since its inception. They've attended, participated as vintners, and donated and purchased auction lots.

"It's going to be an interesting year for the taste of wine for those that were affected by the smoke and fire," Teri said.

Even if some vintners from California who planned to participate in the next Naples wine festival bow out, she said the event is fortunate enough to attract wineries from other parts of the country — and the world including Italy and France.

Kelly Carter, director of communications for Alpha Omega Winery in St. Helena, California, said the fires haven't changed the vintner's plans to participate in the wine festival. The fires have not come close enough to damage the winery, but they have disrupted its business, forcing it to stop its tastings and close to the public because of ongoing air quality concerns and temporary power outages.

"About 80 percent of our grapes are in already," Carter said. "And what's remaining is Cabernet Sauvignon, which is thick skinned grapes and due to how far the Cabernet Sauvignon is along there is no danger as far as the smoke permeating the skin. It's just a matter of washing the skin."

Shari Staglin, CEO of Staglin Family Vineyard in Rutherford, California, said with the wine festival so far away she expects her winery's participation in it "won't be impacted at all." Her winery is signed up for one of the vintner dinners.

Several of her employees, she said, have lost their homes.

"We pray there won't be more. Many are much worse off than we are and our hearts reach out to them. Right now, all are in survival mode," Staglin said in an email.



Dozens of wine glasses sit out during the 2017 "Bright Sunshiny Day" Auction at the Naples Winter Wine Festival on Saturday, January 28, 2017 at the The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort in North Naples. (Photo: Katie Klann/Naples Daily News)

Some vintners aren't as certain they can make it to the Naples wine festival as planned.

Beth Novak Milliken, president and CEO of Spottswoode Estate Vineyard & Winery in St. Helena, California, said in an email: "Until things are under control, which they are not right now, I will not know if it will affect our participation in Naples. I imagine that we will be there, if I had to guess. I will know more later, with the passage of a bit more time."

Maureen Cottingham, executive director of the Sonoma Valley Vintners & Growers Alliance, said many wineries have been threatened or damaged in her area including ones that have participated in the Naples wine festival.

"As far as damage, I think the biggest loss we've seen in our region are those vintners that have lost their private homes and there are probably more than nine different vintners that have lost their homes," she said.

One winery in the region lost a storage building that had its 2015 and 2016 vintages in it, Cottingham said.

"As the days go on and as the fires continue to burn, we continue to get reports that update us on the standing of each one of our members," she said.

There's been an outpouring of support coming from Naples — and Southwest Florida — because of the strong connections with the Northern California vintners, Cottingham said.

It wasn't long ago that residents here were dealing with their own natural disaster, called Hurricane Irma, and recovering from it, so that makes the support and offers to help all that much more heartwarming, Cottingham said.

"I think that is a beautiful thing," she said.

Patsy McGaughy, communications director for the Napa Valley Vintners, said she didn't think any of the wineries with significant damage in her area were regular participants in the Naples wine festival or Southwest Florida wine fest.

David and Karynne Duncan of Silver Oak, who have locations in Napa Valley and Alexander Valley and will be the honored vintners for the 2018 Naples wine festival, do not have winery damage, McGaughy said in an email. The fires, however, forced the winery to close its tasting rooms for the safety of its guests and employees for days.

The wine and food fest's signature vintner for next year is Jackson Family Wines, which has substantial winery and vineyard holdings in California.

On Tuesday, the winery's president and CEO, Rick Tigner, said in a company statement that the priority remains the safety of family, friends and colleagues — and that harvesting and farming had been suspended.

"Currently there appears to be no damage to any of our facilities but we are monitoring the situation closely," he said.

## Massive wildfires leave destruction across California

Full Screen

Before the outbreak of wildfires SWFL Children's Charities planned to host a special dinner in Southwest Florida to honor Jackson Family Wines in November.

"We hope they can join us," Hawkins said. "It's up in the air at this point, until we know that they are OK."

The next time the charity's board meets, she said a topic of discussion will be how to help the vintners and their businesses and families recover.

Disaster relief efforts have already begun, led by the [Community Foundation of Sonoma County/Resilience Fund](http://www.communityfoundationofsonoma.org/resilience-fund) (<http://donatenow.networkforgood.org/1431417>), the [Napa Valley Community Foundation](http://www.napavalleycf.org/fire-donation-page/) (<http://www.napavalleycf.org/fire-donation-page/>), and the [Community Foundation of Mendocino County](http://www.communityfound.org/for-donors/donate-today/community-funds/disaster-fund-for-mendocino-county/) (<http://www.communityfound.org/for-donors/donate-today/community-funds/disaster-fund-for-mendocino-county/>).

Festival	Festival auction	Festival auction	auction to open next week
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