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Auction Napa Valley Raises Large Sum

Napa wine auction raises $5.8 million for charities despite inclement weather.

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BY VIRGINIE BOONE



Neither rain nor mud nor cold could quell the party atmosphere of Auction Napa Valley, one of the wine world's oldest and most successful charity events.

Now in its 31st year, the auction raised a total of $7.3 million by the end of the fourth day of tastings, tours, a barrel auction and its signature live auction, which alone brought in $5.8 million.

The live auction total was down slightly from last year's $6.9 million, but was enough for the Napa Valley Vintners to donate a cumulative $100 million to affordable housing, healthcare, youth services and other non-profit programs over its multi-decade history.

"It's an opportunity for Mother Nature to really shine, and Mother Nature really is in charge," said vintner Amelia Moran Ceja of Ceja Vineyards as the rain poured unceasingly. "And still have beautiful wines from one of the most consistent wine regions in the world."

The live auction kicked off Saturday, June 4 at 3pm at Meadwood Napa Valley in St. Helena as a relentless rain carried on—the first time the event has been subjected to such cold, miserable weather. Still, spirits were high and the bidding was generous as the room full of some 800 bidders, vintners and assorted community supporters mingled and enjoyed Napa's finest wines.

"It's a nice change," said Bill Harlan of Harlan Estate and BOND wineries, referring to the weather. "There's good energy. It'll make people appreciate next year even more."

Chuck McMinn of Vineyard 29 agrees. "It's a change-up," he says, but felt the weather gave attendees the opportunity to relax and let their hair down.

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Without the buzz of celebrity attendees such as Oprah Winfrey, this year the crowd was vintner-heavy, giving it more of a community feel. Gavin Newsom, former mayor of San Francisco and current lieutenant governor of California, was on hand as a vintner to drum up excitement for Lot Number 17, donated by his wineries, CADE Estate Winery and PlumpJack.

The top lot of the day, however, was Lot Number 10, a dinner and cooking classes with acclaimed chef Michael Chiarello, who was in attendance to cook the auction dinner, pairing his dishes with seven bottles of wine from Staglin Family Vineyard.

Dan Duckhorn, former owner of Duckhorn Vineyards, won the lot at $300,000, which was quickly doubled for another willing bidder, John Thompson, chairman of the board of Symantec Corporation.

The lot from BOND, five bottles of wine plus a cooking class with chef Christopher Kostow of the Restaurant at Meadowood, also was doubled, raising a total of $240,000, as was a trip to Paris and Burgundy with Raymond Vineyards proprietor Jean-Charles Boisset, who immediately agreed to double the lot when two bidders, including Oakville Ranch founder Mary Miner, said they'd each pay $195,000 to win it.

Another top bidder, M.K. Koo of Korea, warmed the hearts of event organizers and the crowd by bidding $100,000 for Fund-A-Need, the money going directly to charity.

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