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Soggy but happy, Auction Napa Valley bidders raise $7.3 million

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Sasha Paulsen | Posted: Saturday, June 4, 2011 9:16 pm | (9) Comments

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SATURDAY JUNE 4, 2011 ST. HELENA, CA - Garen Staglin, middle, of Staglin Family Vineyard pops a cork and sprays fellow vintners and bidders with sparkling wine while celebrating the 2011 Auction Napa Valley milestone achievement of raising over 100M dollars over 31 years at the completion of Saturday's live auction event. Jorgen Gulliksen/Register

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What rain?

By the end of Saturday's live auction at Meadowood, the chief liquid in the air was sparkling wine shooting from bottles as Napa Valley Vintners celebrated passing the $100 million mark of money raised to give back to the Napa community.

Koerner Rombauer, patriarch of the family chairing Auction Napa Valley 2011, led the parade of exuberant vintners, who danced on the auction stage with bottles of wine as confetti rained down in the tent where the live auction took place on the rainy afternoon — the first time it has rained in the 31 years of the annual charity event.

Last year, the Vintners gave $6.8 million to local nonprofits, bringing the total to $97 million. This year's event, as of Saturday, had raised $7.3 million from the live auction, barrel auction and the online e-auction to date. The e-auction, with 150 lots offered to bidders online, closes Sunday at 6 p.m.

Saturday's main event, the live auction, got off to a soggy but spirited start in the early afternoon. LL Bean was clearly the designer of choice for bidders and vintners as they began arriving at Meadowood Resort, where the auction is held under a tent on the fairway.

Earlier in the week, as predictions of torrential rain storms began showing up on weather systems, the Vintners had converted the fairway into a veritable tent city of covered walkways, lined with redwood chips, leading to the main auction tent as well as two adjacent tents where lunch and dinner were served, and tents for the meal preparation.

An impromptu barn was built in four hours for chefs Cindy Pawlcyn, who had planned the picnic lunch, and Michael Chiarello, who had intended to barbecue in open pits for a post-auction dinner.

The rain did arrive early Saturday morning, and volunteers were handing out umbrellas to guests as they

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Auction Napa Valley 2011 took place on Saturday at Meadowood Resort in St. Helena.

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arrived.

Jeans, sweaters and rain boots were more in evidence than designer gowns and shoes.

Naomi Hardt, who traveled from Lake Tahoe with her husband, Tom, to attend the auction for the first time, was one of the few brave women tiptoeing through the sodden lawn in her Roberto Cavalli shoes. “I didn’t bring boots,” she said, laughing. “I can’t believe it. I live in Lake Tahoe and I have tons of boots, but I didn’t think I’d have to bring them to Napa.”

With rain thundering down on the tents, red and white wine was flowing, and the Silverado Pick-ups, a local rock band, set a lively tone, playing the Rolling Stones, Beatles and other crowd-pleasers. “This is an American kind of thing, so I think it’s appropriate we play the blues,” said vintner Jeff Gargiulo, who played with the band.

By 3 p.m., the main auction tent was filled with about 800 people as bidding began on the 40 luxury lots that included trips to China, Maui and Paris as well as impressive wine collections.

The top-selling lot was a joint project from Chiarello Family Vineyards and Staglin Family Vineyards. It included wine, vineyard tours and cooking lessons with Michael Chiarello, who took time off from cooking the auction dinner to encourage bidders on his lot, standing by the stage with Shari and Garen Staglin and cheering as bids mounted to $300,000. The trio agreed to double the lot, bringing in a total of $600,000 from two winning bidders.

Another vintner who agreed to double his lot was Jean-Charles Boisset, the new owner of Raymond Vineyards, who was offering wine plus dinner in Paris and a trip to Burgundy. As a bidding war brought the lot to $190,000, Boisset was asked if he might offer two packages, and he replied, “Of course!”

Midway through the auction, bidding on the lots paused as a parade of children carrying balloons and cupcakes marched into the tent to launch the Fund-a-Need drive, in which guests were invited to raise their paddles to contribute to a fund for needy children in the Napa Valley. The response brought in $1.1 million.

At the conclusion of the auction, the new chairpersons for Auction Napa Valley 2012, the Chappellet family of Chappellet Vineyards and Winery, were introduced.

Koerner Rombauer told the crowd he was happy with this year’s results — as were the rest of the vintners. Five years ago, as the economy began to slide into recession, the Napa Valley Vintners had pledged that regardless of auction results, they would give $5 million a year for five years to the nonprofits that have come to depend on support from the auction. With the proceeds from this year’s auction, which will be distributed later in the year, they’ve kept their pledge.

“It’s a successful day,” Rombauer said. Not only had they topped the $100 million mark and kept their pledge, but everyone had cheerfully survived the first auction in the rain.

“I don’t mind the rain,” said vintner Amelia Ceja, showing off her rain boots. “I don’t mind looking funny if I am comfortable, and besides, it’s good for us: Mother Nature keeps us humble.”

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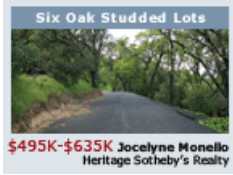








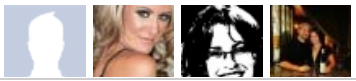








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