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AUCTION REIGNS

Vintners raise cash for nonprofits

David Stoneberg | Posted: Thursday, June 9, 2011 12:00 am | (0) Comments

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Woodside residents John and Sandra Thompson were all smiles Saturday at Auction Napa Valley after winning a bid for wines from Spottswoode Estate Vineyard & Winery and Vineyard 7 & 8. Along with the large-format bottles, the Thompsons bought a fully restored 1949 International K-B2 pickup truck. David Stoneberg photos

Despite record-breaking rainy weather for Saturday's live auction, the four-day Auction Napa Valley raised another $7.3 million for local nonprofit agencies.

Saturday evening, at the end of the live auction, a large group of people crowded onto the stage, many carrying numbers celebrating the more than $100 million the event has raised in its 31-year history.

John Thompson, a Woodside resident who is a regular ANV bidder, said the weather didn't dampen the excitement inside the huge tents that housed some 800 people who attended the Saturday auction.

"What was most interesting about this year's auction was that, in light of the weather, people turned out and really, really opened up and had a good time," Thompson said. "The weather didn't seem to deter the bidding at all."

John and Sandra Thompson bought two lots, a joint lot by the Staglin and Chiarello families and another joint lot by Spottswoode and Vineyard 7&8. They spent $240,000 for their lots.

The weather was a concern all last week, both for the Friday event — the Barrel Auction and Marketplace — and for Saturday's live auction. The honorary chairs were Koerner Rombauer and his family. Koerner's son, K.R., spoke to a group of media at a breakfast event prior to the opening of Friday's Marketplace and thanked them for being a part of this special community event. In his closing



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Top live lots

1. Fund-A-Need, $1.1 million
2. Staglin, Chiarello families, $600,000
3. Chappellet, $400,000
4. Raymond, $390,000
5. Bond, $240,000
6. Opus One, $180,000
7. Rombauer, $160,000
8. Shafer, $160,000
9. Araujo, $130,000
10. Spottswoode, Vineyard 7&8, $120,000
11. Dalla Valle Vineyards, $120,000

comments, he joked that the Rombauer family, as hosts of this year's auction, had created many committees to prepare for the auction events. But the one committee they failed to include was a weather committee, to control the weather ... and he noted that next year's hosts may want to do that. It brought good-hearted chuckles from the group.

The four-day Auction Napa Valley is made up of three auctions, the live auction that raised

$5.8 million, the Barrel Auction, $1.2 million and the E-auction, which raised $370,000.

Of the 40 live auction lots up for bid on Saturday, four sold for less than $50,000; 18 sold for between $50,000 and $100,000; 13 sold for between $100,000 and $200,000; and four sold for more than $200,000. The top lot was the Napa Valley Vintners Fund-A-Need lot, which raises money for children's health and wellness. People throughout the huge tent raised their paddles to the tune of $1.1 million. Koerner and Sandy Rombauer donated $100,000 to the effort. The Rombauers also were active in the auction, buying a lot from the Jones Family Vineyards for $90,000. It included a 12-magnum vertical of their cabernet sauvignons from 1996 to 2007 and a 1956 Austin Healey 100-4 sports car.

The bidders knew what they were looking for on Saturday afternoon as the second lot, for seven bottles of 2007 Maya, a Bordeaux blend from Dalla Valle Vineyards, sold for $120,000.

Another mostly-wine lot, 20 magnums of Araujo Estate Cabernet Sauvignon from the Eisele Vineyard from 1991 to 2010, sold for $130,000. Bidding quickly reached $100,000 and auctioneer Fritz Hatton exhorted the crowd: "This is a $200,000 lot, easy."

The next lot featured chef Michael Chiarello on video, who was in the kitchen with a staff of 24 preparing dinner for the 800 guests. He said they had spent 18 hours a day preparing the four-course meal that included, as entrees, pit-roasted whole lamb and pan-roasted sea bass with two sides.

Chiarello added, "Napa Valley is all about adversity. We got through phylloxera, we'll get through this weather."

When the bidding for the Staglin-Chiarello lot quickly rose past $200,000, Chiarello appeared in person with Garen and Shari Staglin at the front of the stage. The lot sold for $300,000 and then Garen decided to double it, offering the experiences and wines to the two top bidders.

It was one of the four lots doubled on Saturday; others were the Chappellet, Raymond and Bond lots.

Auctioneer Ursula Hermacinski honored Margrit Biever Mondavi as the Robert Mondavi Winery lot came up for auction. Hermacinski said the room included so many generous bidders, "but you are the grande dame," she said directly to Mondavi. Speaking about the lot, which included two 750mls of the winery's Reserve Napa Valley from 1971 to 2006, Hermacinski said, "I've never seen before a 35-year vertical starting in 1971." Additionally, the lot included a 12-liter bottle of RMW Cabernet Sauvignon grown from grapes in the To Kalon Vineyard. Mondavi hand-painted the bottle. As the bidding started at $10,000 and quickly went to $50,000, Hermacinski called out the bids to $90,000, which she said was "rock star bidding." It ended at $100,000.

Although the day was rainy, it didn't much matter as the great lawn at Meadowood Napa Valley, where the auction has been held since its beginning in 1981, was covered with tents: one for walking to the two tents where lunch and dinner were served, and the main auction tent.

Although Meadowood's lawns suffered from the rain — requiring not stiletto heels and sandals, but mud boots to safely walk throughout the tent — the auction did not. Inside the tents, people were dry and warm; they drew together, held conversations, shared glasses of wine (mostly cabernet sauvignon from magnums) and raised their paddles to support Napa Valley charities. It was an auction to remember.

(Star correspondent Catherine Seda contributed to this report.)

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