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Napa Valley Rises to Top Dog Again

Auction Napa Valley rakes in \$16.9 million for charity with bids for wine and other items

by Paul Franson



Live auction attendees warm up their paddles Saturday during Auction Napa Valley 2013. Photo by Jason Tinacci for the Napa Valley Vintners

Napa, Calif.—The Napa Valley Vintners' 33rd annual Auction Napa Valley smashed all records, snaring \$16.9 million in donations for health care and youth services in Napa County.

The results exceeded the previous record of \$10.5 million raised in 2005 by more than 60%—and more than doubled last year's \$8 million earnings.

This year's figure brings the 33-year total raised by the Vintners' "American Wine Classic" for Napa County health, education and other worthy causes to more than \$127 million.

Part of the increase can be attributed to an improving economy, but chairs Shari and Garen Staglin, and children Shannon and Brandon, applied what they've learned in conducting their very successful Music Festival for Mental Health to sharpen the auction's focus and target big bidders.

They held a series of preview dinners in top spots like Houston, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Singapore—as well as Naples, Fla., a wealthy city whose own auction briefly surpassed Napa Valley's for a few years.

At the auction, they displayed the live lots (using dummy bottles of wine due to the heat) and extended the barrel auction through Saturday, moving the bidding to Saturday's main event so those who lost out on the big lots could still take home some treasures.

A subtle change pays off

In the past, the Napa auction focused on wine. (It originally was called the Napa Valley Wine Auction when it was started by Robert and Margrit Mondavi and other visionaries in

Wine Industry Metrics

Off-Premise Sales >>	Month	12 Months
April 2012	\$386 million	\$4,842 million
April 2013	\$400 million	\$5,128 million
		4%
		6%

Direct-to-Consumer Shipments >>	Month	12 Months
April 2012	\$141 million	\$1,347 million
April 2013	\$142 million	\$1,484 million
		1%
		10%

Winery Job Index >>	Month	12 Months
April 2012	173	147
April 2013	275	174
		59%
		18%

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Newcomer Naples reached out to national and global corporations and made impossible-to-buy experiences and merchandise its focus, though wine remained a big part of the auction.

The [Napa Vintners](#) claimed that they weren't in a competition with Naples but have substantially beefed up their non-wine offerings with unique experiences like trips with international superstars such as Piero Antinori, Baroness Philippine Rothschild and Jean-Charles Boisset, who have wine interests in Napa Valley as well as in Italy and France.

Other trips were dream visits to Argentina with native Delia Viader and to Korea with the Hi Sang Lee, the owner of Dana Estates in Napa Valley (the top lot, which was doubled to top \$1 million), or a golfing vacation to Scotland with the Staglins.

Still other lots donated by vintners (often with sponsors) included use of—or a chance to buy—exotic sports cars and a raffle that featured an exotic Audi R8 convertible.

When the dust settled, however, some of the biggest of the 46 lots featured mostly Napa Valley wine, including a one-of-a-kind 12-liter bottle of cult favorite Screaming Eagle Cabernet, which went for \$500,000. Ironically, a bottle half that size fetched \$550,000 during the dot-com frenzy of 2005.

The Harlan Estate donation including four magnums of selections from the winery's library fetched \$800,000; a collection of 40 wines celebrating the Joseph Phelps Vineyards' 40th anniversary went for \$450,000, and 100 bottles of wine honoring the Cent'anni (100th birthday) of one of the auction's founders, the late Robert Mondavi, earned \$260,000.

The biggest lot, however, gave the 100 bidders nothing but satisfaction. Generous donors pledged from \$1,000 to an incredible \$600,000 to fund mental and physical health and education for Napa youth. It totaled \$3.7 million.

That total was undoubtedly boosted by co-chair Brandon Staglin's discussion of his own bout with schizophrenia and Napa County District Attorney Gary Lieberstein's story of losing his own son to mental illness. He bid the first \$1,000.

The message was underscored by a song country singer Billy Dean wrote just for the auction, "Walk with Me," which inspired many to lift their paddles.

The top live auction lots (plus the Fund-a-Need lot)

- Fund-a-need, \$3.7 million
- [Dana Estates](#), two at \$500,000, for \$1.02 million.
- [Harlan Estate](#), \$800,000
- [Screaming Eagle Winery](#), \$500,000
- [Joseph Phelps Vineyards](#), \$450,000
- [Darioush](#), \$400,000; and [Staglin Family Vineyard](#), \$400,000
- [Araujo Estate Wines](#) and [Dalla Valle Vineyards](#), \$340,000
- [Far Niente/Dolce/Nickel & Nickel](#) and [Favia Erickson Winegrowers](#), \$300,000
- [Spottswoode Estate Vineyard & Winery](#), \$280,000
- [Bure Family Wines/Morlet Family Vineyards/Vineyard 7 & 8](#), \$280,000
- [Robert Mondavi Winery](#), \$260,000.

Auction attendees enjoyed up to four days of fun, from Thursday night's dinner with vintners at their homes or wineries to a Sunday morning farewell brunch.

More than 2,000 people attended the Napa Valley Barrel Auction on Friday. It was held for the first time at [Raymond Vineyards](#) in the heart of the valley, and owner Jean-Charles Boisset spared no effort to make the auction succeed, including emptying his barrel chai to provide spacious room for attendees to taste samples from the 100 barrel lots to the clank

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of wooden placards hitting the ground with each bid.

Though the barrel room was chilled for the wines, outside, temperatures hit the mid 90°s as guest sampled delectable food from 40 of Napa Valley's famed restaurants. Missing were Thomas Keller's restaurants including the French Laundry and Bouchon, which have been stalwarts in the past.

In the heat, most people opted for white, sparkling or rosé wines. Though Napa Valley is world-famous for its Cabernets, there's been an explosion of quality rosés from these vintners, many made in small quantities and aimed at events such as this one.

Friday night saw more vintner dinners ranging from tiny formal affairs to boisterous barbecues featuring energetic rock for dancing.

The big event was Saturday at Meadowood Resort in St. Helena, whose principal owner is vintner William Harlan, and which has hosted every Auction Napa Valley.

About 1,000 attendees gathered for a walk-around lunch prepared by nine of Bravo! TV's "Top Chef" winners.

The auction started off strong and continued, with only a few lots going for less than \$100,000, as veteran Auction Napa Valley auctioneers Fritz Hatton and Ursula Hermacinski were joined by Brit Humphrey Butler to take bids from a willing audience. It was in strong contrast to recent years when Hatton was known to shamelessly wheedle money out of hesitant bidders.

Barrel auction

Two other auctions were included in the action. Bidding on cases of Napa Valley wine futures in the cool barrel room got off to a robust start Friday, and by the end of the Barrel Auction on Saturday night, the total reached nearly \$1.7 million, a new Auction Napa Valley record. This year's top barrel lots (each lot is 10 cases of Napa Valley wine) are:

- [Shafer Vineyards](#) \$78,000
- [Realm Cellars](#) \$61,350
- [Continuum Estate](#) \$59,200
- [Ovid Napa Valley](#) \$52,500
- [Cardinale](#) \$44,550
- [Kongsgaard Wine](#) \$41,550
- [Spottswoode Estate Vineyard & Winery](#) \$37,200
- [Gemstone](#) \$34,100
- Joseph Phelps Vineyards \$33,050
- Vineyard 7 & 8 \$32,600
- [Crocker & Starr Wines](#) \$31,750
- [Pahlmeyer Winery](#) \$31,750
- [Promise](#) \$31,000

E-Auction

Wine enthusiasts from around the world (and at the auction) could also bid online on more than 170 lots featuring Napa Valley wines and unique experiences. More than \$430,000 was raised, another Auction Napa Valley record. New this year, the E-Auction also had its own fund-a-need component, which generated more than \$30,000 in donations.

Top E-Auction lots were:

- [Sherwin Family Vineyards](#) \$15,200
- [Domaine Chandon](#) \$8,129
- [Larkmead Vineyards](#) \$8,000
- [Grgich Hills Estate](#) \$7,600
- [Beringer Vineyards](#) \$7,227
- [Hall Wines](#) \$7,100
- Joseph Phelps Vineyards \$7,100
- [Artesa Winery](#) and Gordon Huether Art Gallery \$6,700
- Napa Valley Vintners & Fairmont \$6,600
- Napa Valley Vintners & Riedel \$6,200

The dinner after the auction was prepared by Chef Joseph Lenn of the Blackberry Farm resort in the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee. Chef Lenn's dinner blended Piedmont

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flavors with locally sourced ingredients that proved a winning combination as guests lingered under the giant redwood trees on the golf course at Meadowood.

As the sun set over the hills, the stars came out and the evening ended with dancing to the sounds of the Auction Napa Valley All-Star Band, featuring local and visiting musicians.

A welcome trend this year was young bidders attending Auction Napa Valley with parents or grandparents who have been long-time patrons. Chelsea and Rachel Adams, granddaughters of B.A. "Red" Adams of Louisiana, who was celebrating his 80th birthday by bringing his family to the auction, purchased lots donated by Dalla Valle Vineyards and [Rombauer Vineyards](#).

Julia and Katie Jackson, daughters of Barbara Banke and the late Jess Jackson of [Jackson Family Wines](#), were actively bidding throughout the event and won both the [Antica Napa Valley](#)-Antinori Family Wine Estates/[Opus One](#) and the [Cliff Lede/Gargiulo Vineyards/Silver Oak Cellars/Twomey Cellars](#) joint lots.

Shannon Staglin observed, "Many of my friends and peers volunteered and contributed to this year's auction. It's good to see the next generation getting involved and continuing the spirit of generosity. It was great to connect with this new and next generation of bidders who share our enthusiasm for giving to the Napa Valley community while enjoying our wines."

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