

The Press Democrat

PEG MELNIK

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT | June 2, 2018, 10:47PM

Auction Napa Valley projected to raise more than \$13 million in first post-fire edition



The Calistoga Club House served as a refuge for those who lost their homes in the October wildfires, and the children who took the stage at Auction Napa Valley Saturday made a sentimental request for paddle-holders to offer more support for organizations that have helped in the disaster's wake, including the Boys & Girls Club of St. Helena and Calistoga.

The children's Fund-The-Future lot raised more than \$2 million, boosting the auction's weekend take to a projected \$13.4 million, a dip from last year's \$15.7 million.

The action came before a sold-out crowd of 900 gathered under the white tent at St. Helena's Meadowood Napa Valley Resort, where auction lots included premium wines, catered parties and international trips.

The auction, now in its 38th year, capped off a week of fundraising events put on by the Napa Valley Vintners to benefit local nonprofits focusing on community health and children's education.

Co-auctioneer Ursula Hermacinski, who introduced the Fund-The-Future lot, said "here's where the rubber meets the road. Here we have the opportunity to do good because we can."

Fund-The-Future donations came in increments ranging from \$5,000 to \$500,000.

Auction Napa Valley Totals by Year

The annual auction raises money to benefit local nonprofits focusing on community health and children's education.

2018 \$13.4 million (projected)

2017: \$15.7 million

2016: \$14.3 million

2015: \$15.8 million

2014: \$18.7 million

2013: \$16.9 million

Snacking on gourmet pizza, dried nuts and cheese, Kathy Simpson, co-vintner of St. Helena's Barbour Vineyards, said she was pleased with the free-flowing generosity of the bidders, even though she was outbid on a lot.

"There's a lot of competition out there," she said, with a laugh. "But it all goes for a good cause. Even if we didn't win, we're happy to be under-bidders."

The top single lot of the day sold for \$1 million, and it was introduced by golf pro Natalie Gulbis. The Sacramento native surprised auctiongoers when she putted four light, faux golf balls into the crowd. The lot featured VIP tickets to the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach next year and a seven-night stay at the Lodge of Pebble Beach for two couples, as well as 18 bottles of Napa Valley wine.

Another spiraling bid that surprised the crowd was the Opus One offering. It initially sold for \$700,000, and then it was expanded from two couples to four, boosting the sale to \$1.4 million. The lot featured a stay in Versailles, with tickets to attend the famous costume party L'Orangerie of Versailles, and a trip to Paris for four couples, along with four 6-liter bottles of Opus One.

The crowd cheered when motor racing icon and vintner Danica Patrick introduced her auction lot. Patrick, who retired from racing last month, collaborated on the offering that showcases her brand — Somnium Wine — along with Amizetta Estate and Gamble Family Vineyards. The lot, which sold for \$300,000, features a seat as Patrick's passenger for a few 100-mph laps around the Sonoma Raceway.

The auction's projected overall take was less than the \$15.2 million raised in January by the Naples Winter Wine Festival at its live auction. The Sonoma County Wine Auction raised \$ 5.2 million last year.

Napa Valley Vintners Chairman David Pearson of Opus One said he was grateful for the ongoing support the region has received after the Northern California wildfires. One major philanthropic effort, the Napa Valley Community Disaster Relief Fund, has raised more than \$15 million in contributions since last October.
