



naples WINTER WINE FESTIVAL

gets
GLOWING



Festival Chairs Terry and Bob Edwards | Photo by Roland Scarpa

The Jan. 25-27 Naples Winter Wine Festival is getting its glow on. Festival chairs Terry and Bob Edwards are taking inspiration from the shimmering art of Yves Klein to bring alive the theme – When Stars Align. Multiple elements are glistening, glimmering and glowing, including festival décor under the auction tent, invitations and the auction catalog. Precious jewels from renowned jewelers such as Graff Diamonds, Chopard and Bulgari add shine to the 67 auction lots meant to entice festival guests to bid high and often to benefit underprivileged and at-risk children in Collier County.

The Edwards, art supporters and collectors, selected the theme with both art and children in mind. “Everyone involved in the festival is a star, from the 54 Naples Children & Education Foundation trustees hosting the affair, to the 16 celebrity chefs and the 28 world-renowned vintners,

hundreds of volunteers, many sponsors, donors and auction bidders,” said Bob, who with his wife Terry are trustees of NCEF, the founding organization of the festival. “They are all stars in raising funds for the true stars of the festival – underprivileged and at-risk children.”

The festival’s appeal to well-heeled philanthropists and wine lovers has become legendary. Ranked by Wine Spectator since 2004 as the most successful charity wine auction in the nation, the Naples festival is also rated a top 10 event for wealthy Americans by The Luxury Institute.

What maintains the festival’s appeal, besides, of course, coming to Naples in late January? Exclusivity is one reason. Tickets are only available for 550 guests; typically many millionaires and a few billionaires are among the attendees. The festival is also well known for its intimate vintner dinners

in gulf-shore mansions presided over by the biggest names in the culinary and wine worlds. Luxury treasure hunters also revel in one-of-a-kind auction lots of rare wines, private excursions and unique experiences.

Yet a main draw, according to festival organizers, is making a difference for children in need. Since 2001, \$107 million has been raised under the auction tent for Collier County’s underprivileged and at-risk children, and more than 150,000 children have benefited.

“We turn wine into miracles,” said Bob. “People ask how we raise so much money, and it really comes down to creating a very special experience and environment that brings out people’s spirit of generosity.”

The idea to hold a world-class wine festival in Naples came about in 2000 when 18 Naples couples got together. They loved fine cuisine and rare wines, and in fact two

owned their own wineries. They talked about the area's pockets of poverty that co-exist with Naples' posh resorts and pristine beaches and decided to put their wine-and-culinary passions to work on behalf of children in need.

At the first festival in 2001, trustees raised more than \$2 million under the auction tent, exceeding their wildest dreams. Each year since, millions are raised in an afternoon, with all proceeds under the auction tent going to improve the physical, emotional and educational lives of underprivileged and at-risk children in Collier County.

Last January, the live auction brought \$12.4 million, with the top money-raising lot capturing multiple bids totaling \$1.2 million for a private concert by Grammy-award winner LeAnn Rimes. The concert, attended by 152 winning bidders, took place in November at a Naples beachfront estate, accompanied by dinner prepared by Tom Colicchio of Bravo TV's "Top Chef."

While in Naples for the concert, Rimes visited Naples Equestrian Challenge, one of 24 children's charities currently receiving grants from NCEF, to see firsthand how festival proceeds benefit children. Rimes later commented that having met the children who benefited from the concert auction lot made her feel a special connection to the cause.



Smoke and Mirrors vintner dinner | Photo by Erik Kellar

CELESTIAL AFFAIR

The festival's 16 vintner dinners on Friday evening are among the highlights of the three-day affair, and hosts meticulously attend to every detail and hold fast to the theme. "Vintner dinners will be spectacularly staged, each with a different, elegant spin on celestial décor and entertainment and matched to the cuisine and wine," Terry said.

Multiple consultations among chefs, vintners, sommeliers and hosts

Barbara Banke, Honored Vintner



Michael Anthony, Chef de Cuisine | Photo by Ellen Silverman





A luxury trip to Bangkok and other cities in Asia is among the auction lots

take place in the months leading up to the festival. Limousine service provided for each guest is just one element designed to make it a perfect evening, and a safe-driving one.

Festival stars presiding over vintner dinners include celebrity chefs Michael Anthony of Gramercy Tavern, Lee Hefter of Spago, and Marco Canora of Hearth. Vintners, personally pouring their special wines, include the proprietors of Colgin Cellars, Domaine Ponsot, Torbreck, Shafer and other luminaries. Master Sommelier Larry Stone, arguably the most renowned sommelier in the U.S., will be among 10 sommelier stars pouring vintners' finest wines during the festival.

In addition to vintner dinners, guests attend Meet the Kids Day for an up-close

Meet the Kids Day several years ago with a few patrons attending, and now it's grown tenfold," commented NCEF board chair Anne Welsh McNulty. "Patrons are so moved by the children and the odds they have overcome. The experience puts real names and faces to the impact auction bidders can have the next day."

On Saturday of the festival weekend, the culinary showcase and live auction takes place at The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples – a founding sponsor of the festival. Wine tastings throughout the weekend, a post-auction wine-down party, and closing celebration brunch on Sunday completes festival events.

look at how festival proceeds make a difference, with time to interact with children from NCEF-supported charities. "We started

OUT-OF-THIS-WORLD AUCTION LOTS

Although the festival takes place in late January, creating auction lots with beyond-compare treasures and experiences starts well over a year prior. Participating vintners and chefs contribute to lots, offering their finest wines, exclusive wine tastings, tours, stays and dining experiences. Private wine collectors also dig deep into their cellars to compile one-of-a-kind lots.

Among auction lots for the 2013 festival are a private jet trip around the world and an unparalleled vertical of Château Mouton-Rothschild from 1945 through 2009. Star-studded lots include tickets to ABC's "Dancing with the Stars" finale and a private dinner in Bel Air at vintner Ann Colgin's home with the show's professional dancers on hand for private lessons, and dinner at vintner Ken and Grace Evenstad's home in Oregon with "Star Trek" star William Shatner among the guests. There are also voyages to the Greek Isles and



Rhône Valley's Château Beaucastel is among wine lots
Photo by Mila Bridger

Turkey on private yachts, an excursion through Bangkok, Hong Kong, Macau and Tokyo; and special stays at vineyard properties around the world with private tours, tastings and dinners accompanied by the proprietors themselves.

There are also auction lots of special interest to guys and ladies. For the guys, there is a sporting trip to Scotland with stays in a neoclassical mansion and daytime fishing, hunting and skeet shooting on the private grounds. For the ladies, a Paris trip includes behind-the-scenes tours of several legendary fashion houses and a private-guided journey through the closed-world of haute couture fashion.

FOR THE KIDS

Amid the high-energy, party atmosphere under the auction tent, the glamour and pageantry of the vintner dinners and the friendships of a lifetime that are forged at the intimate venues, the true purpose of the Naples Winter Wine Festival is threaded throughout according to Bob Edwards. "It's all for the kids,"



Auction winners rejoice | Photo by Tom Harper

he said. "Thanks to festival proceeds, NCEF has made grants to 36 children's charities, collaboratively funded a pediatric dental center and early childhood development center, and taken a bite out of children's hunger with the delivery of 1.6 million meals for families in need. We couldn't do it without our generous patrons and sponsors, and boy what a good time everyone has along the way."

For more information about the Naples Winter Wine Festival, please visit www.NaplesWineFestival.com or call 888.837.4919.



Meet the Kids Days
Photo by Louis Venne