



Giving 'big' makes comeback at nation's top charity wine auction

Festival guests Kirsten Ferrara and Alois Rupp make their way into the auction tent on the grand lawn of The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples as they are cheered on by festival volunteers and a local high school band. All Photo credits: Mila Bridger

Naples Winter Wine Festival uncorks bids totaling \$12 million

Bidders signaled the economy is on the mend at the Naples Winter Wine Festival charity auction, which raised \$12 million for Collier County's underprivileged and at-risk children during the live auction of 70 one-of-a-kind auction lots. The grand total raised since the festival's 2001 inception exceeds \$94.5 million; last year's auction raised \$8.1 million and in recession-bound 2009, \$5.1 million was raised. Wine Spectator has ranked the festival the most successful charity wine auction in the nation since 2004.

Winning bids among the 580 festival guests seated under a giant tent set on the grand lawn of The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort in Naples ranged from \$30,000 to \$1 million. The million-dollar lot was an 8-foot-tall bronze sculpture, Reina Mariana, by artist

Manolo Valdés. The 2,000-pound sculpture traveled to festival grounds from New York City's Columbus Circle, where it had been on display.

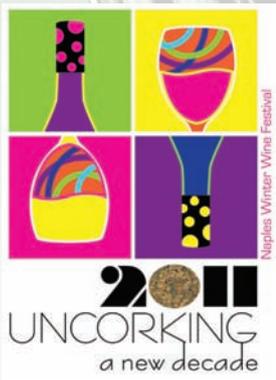
The top wine lot, called Perfection, holding 100 bottles of 100-point wine in a custom cabinet, equaled the highest bid of a wine-only lot in the festival's history at \$400,000. This year's highest bid for a lot featuring a trip was \$480,000 for a 10-day Alaskan cruise aboard a 170-foot luxury yacht.

"The generosity of our patrons, sponsors, donors and other supporters ushered in a new decade of giving for the festival, and we are profoundly grateful on behalf of the thousands of children who will benefit," said Cynthia Sherman, festival chair with her husband, Bruce, trustees of the Naples

Children & Education Foundation, the festival's founding organization.

"Naples is as far from a major vineyard as you can get, and yet it all works because people care," said Bruce. "We make our guests feel special, show them how kids benefit, and their phenomenal giving is the magical result."

Among the top wine lots were four 3-liter bottles of 2005 Domaine Serene Monogram Pinot Noir and 12 assorted bottles of Domaine Serene auctioned for \$190,000; a 39-bottle collection of Sine Qua Non, many in large format and including 100-point wines, captured a winning bid of \$160,000; a 25-year complete vertical of Shafer's Hillside Select and 24 bottles of the vintner's Silver Anniversary Sensation, when released in 2013, resulted in a high bid of \$150,000;



Lydia Fenet, one of the festival's auctioneers, reveled in meeting the children and accepting their tokens of appreciation at Meet the Kids Day.



and four magnums of Colgin Cellars IX Estate Napa Valley Red Wine went for \$130,000.

Lots featuring automobiles reaped major bids: a 2011 Ferrari 458 Italia sports coupe

went for \$950,000 and a fully restored 1956 Corvette, which came with a Napa Valley driving trip, was auctioned for \$300,000.

Lifestyle lots that enticed high bids included \$400,000 for a nine-night trip for two cou-

ples to the 2012 Olympic Games in London with premium-event seating, tickets to a West End show and a private tour of Parliament; \$370,000 for four couples covering two continents, including VIP experiences for three nights in Geneva, Switzerland,

Naples Children & Education Foundation trustee Joan Clifford shows off the handmade crafts children presented to her and other festival guests during Meet the Kids Day at YMCA of the Palms. More than 100 children who benefit from festival proceeds interacted with festival guests on Friday of festival weekend.



\$12 million! Balloons drop as the grand total raised under the auction tent is announced.





NCEF trustee John Scot Mueller gets in on the bidding during the live auction.



Festival chair and NCEF trustee Cynthia Sherman celebrates a guest's winning bid during the live auction of 70 lots.



The Ritz-Carlton Resorts of Naples chefs stand ready to serve guests during the culinary showcase, which takes place prior to the auction on the Golf resort's grand lawn.

and private air travel for 16 to the TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra, Fla., where winners tee off with PGA stars Anthony Kim and Vijay Singh; and a Silver Oak wine dinner and private Clint Black concert for 24 guests went twice for \$320,000 each. Three lots commanded bids of \$240,000 each, including one that featured a private magic lesson by David Blaine, lunch with TV's Regis Philbin, and dinner with TV's Judge Judy at her home, and another that included a Los Angeles adventure for two couples with tickets to the Emmy Awards, two walk-on roles on Showtime's Californication, and dinner at Bouchon with a private tour guided by Chef Thomas Keller.

Lunch Boxes of Love, a fund-a-need lot for on-the-spot donations, raised \$656,520 to help end hunger for children in Collier County, where 24 percent of households with children have food insecurity, higher than the national average of 21 percent.

Festival events spanned three days, including a tour of children's charities, intimate vintner dinners at NCEF trustees' homes prepared by the nation's top chefs with wines personally poured by internationally acclaimed vintners, a wine-down party post-auction and a celebration Sunday brunch.

Festival proceeds have expanded the horizons of 125,000 children through grants to children's charities and collaborative funding of major new initiatives, including primary medical and dental care clinics and an early learning center. In April, NCEF trustees will distribute funds raised at the 2011 festival.

The 2012 festival was held Jan. 27-29. For more information about the Naples Winter Wine Festival, visit www.napleswinefestival.com. ●●●●

