

# SWFL AT TODAY



DANIA MAXWELL/STAFF (2)

LeAnn Rimes sings Saturday during her private concert at a beachfront estate in the Port Royal neighborhood in Naples. The concert, auctioned by the Naples Winter Wine Festival, raised \$1.2 million to aid children in Collier County.

## Country star Rimes sings at Naples home

By **Victoria Macchi**

vmacchi@naplesnews.com; 239-263-4738

A little rock 'n' roll and a lot of country punctuated the night sky at a private home in Naples on Saturday night, when national recording star LeAnn Rimes took the stage in an event that raised \$1.2 million for Collier children's charities.

With hard-driving drums behind the twangy voice that earned the 30-year-old singer a Grammy in the 1990s, Rimes rounded out an evening nearly a year in the making.

The largest money-maker at the 2012 Na-

ples Winter Wine Festival in January, bids on the 152-seat event in Port Royal benefited the Naples Children & Education Foundation, sponsors of the wine festival.

"We didn't know if people were going to bid on it or not," said Joan Clifford, then co-chair of the festival with her husband, Bob.

The pair knew they wanted to create a hefty lot.

It started out a nebulous idea. Something big. Something with celebrity weight behind it.

"Everybody in Naples seems to like star power," Joan Clifford said, recalling the planning stages.

They started pulling it together, and found a couple willing to donate the entertainment and the venue — an elaborate tent on the back lawn of a waterfront home.

The day of the auction in January, they were anxious, unsure the lot would be successful. Joan Clifford worried: "It was either going to be a blockbuster or a bust. And it was a blockbuster."

So many attendees bid on tickets — ranging from \$5,000 to \$20,000 — the event size was increased from 100 to about 150.

"Where the rubber meets the road, it goes

**See RIMES, 17A**



naplesnews.com

Photos of the concert and articles about Naples Winter Wine Festival

## RIMES

from 3A

---

toward the children,” Bob Clifford said.

Saturday night, an intimate concert didn’t translate to sitting around a living room strumming guitars.

The tent held about 150 people at 19 tables beneath chandeliers, as servers ferried in a five-course meal straight from the hands of celebrity chef Tom Colicchio.

All of the seats allowed for views of the elevated stage at the south end of the tent, where Rimes performed with four members of her band.

The event was a pared-down scene for Grammy-winner Rimes.

“It’s really kind of about the lyrics and my voice,” said the singer, who rocketed to the national spotlight in her early teens. “It’s nice to have that intimacy ... I think I’ve kind

of closed that gap, to be able to have them feel like they are kind of part of the show.”

Earlier in the day, Rimes posted to Twitter two photos of her with children at the Naples Equestrian Challenge, a recipient of funds from NCEF.

“I loved actually being able to see where the money goes first-hand,” Rimes said. “The kids were awesome.”

For the evening, she created a set list and spoke in media interviews about her current tour that includes a revamping of the repertoire that earned her worldwide fame.

“The older songs, we have reconfigured ... we keep them interesting for us so we enjoy doing it so people don’t get bored,” Rimes explained.

The singer, who spent less than 48 hours on the ground in Naples before moving on with the rest of her tour, chatted with guests before the show.

“At a lot of these private events, you don’t know if people are going to be into the music or not, but they seemed to be actually entertained by (my) music. They don’t see you as just a band on stage,” she said.

The star was the main draw for Mark and Patt Suwyn, Tennessee transplants who now live in Bonita Springs.

“When we saw this, we knew,” Mark Suwyn said.

So the couple bid during their first time attending the festival and won.

“Coming from Nashville, LeAnn was someone we wanted to see,” he said.

Saturday, they swayed together at the back of the tent as Rimes bounced on stage and belted at the microphone, “Nothing ’bout love makes sense.”

Rimes rose to stardom at 13 with the release of the Bill Mack song “Blue,” making her country music breakthrough in 1996 with her debut album of the same name.