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# Naples Daily News

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Southwest Florida's weird winter deluge

## WET AND WONDERING: WHAT NEXT?



SCOTT MCINTYRE/STAFF (2)

High water surrounds parts of tomato fields Thursday at Pacific Tomato Growers in rural Collier County. Because of the heavy rain and high winds, work in the fields was canceled Thursday.

### ■ Heavy rains create problems for most farmers, headaches for homeowners

**By Kristine Gill and Laura Layden**  
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Most days in January, about 500 seasonal workers dot the fields at Pacific Tomato Growers in Immokalee.

But since Tuesday, and likely through Friday, laborers have not been able to work the fields off Oil Well Road after more than 5 inches of rainfall.

"We got all of the water pumped out, but it's too early to tell what the consequences of this are going to be," said Miguel Talavera, director of farm and operations. "It's affecting agriculture in the whole area."

An unusual amount of rain for winter has damaged vegetable crops statewide and caused major headaches for homeowners.

Many say it's been a winter unlike any in decades.

"There's a lot of people that are surprised we got this much rain in January," Collier County Commissioner Tim Nance said. "The traditional wet areas that are difficult to drain have been having problems similar to what they have in June and July, our main wet season."

Nance said the canal near his home east of Wilson Boulevard North is the highest he's seen since he moved here in the 1980s.

High winds last week tore through some crops across the state and nicked a few tomato plants at Pacific, where stakes were blown from the soil and the vines lay on the ground. Full-time staffers pumped water from the property Wednesday night, and

See RAINS, 4A



Water floods the yard of Justin Visconti's home in Golden Gate Estates on Thursday.

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## GOP debate Rivals relish Trump's absence

■ Candidates spar over immigration, national defense

By Julie Pace and Jill Colvin  
Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — Absent Donald Trump, the Republican presidential candidates

strained to take advantage of a rare opportunity to step out of the front-runner's shadow in Thursday night's debate — a staid, policy-heavy contest that offered a glimpse of what the GOP contest might have been without the unpredictable businessman.

Still, the candidates couldn't resist mocking Trump for boycotting the final debate before Iowa kicks off voting in the 2016 campaign on Monday.

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, who is locked in a tight contest with Trump in Iowa, opened the debate with a sarcastic impression of the real estate mogul's frequent insults of his opponents.

"I'm a maniac and everyone on this stage is stupid, fat and ugly," Cruz said. Then he thanked his fellow candidates for showing Iowa voters respect by showing up.

Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, a frequent target of



Donald Trump



Ted Cruz

See DEBATE, 4A

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See more photos, video and a social media archive from the debate.

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## Naples Winter Wine Festival

# Former Naples family making a triumphant return

### INSIDE

By Harriet Howard Heithaus  
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Wine Fest wish list: Favorite auction lots Neapolitan

George and Pam Hamel left subtropical Naples for the balmy Sonoma Valley in 1996 with a distant dream of someday making their own wine. They did even better than that: Their family has returned as one of the vintners for the Naples Winter Wine Festival.

The senior Hamels still have a home in Naples for short respites, where they'll present one of the festival's vintner's

See HAMELS, 8A



Hamel Family Wines managing director George Hamel III, from left, vintners George Jr. and Pamela Hamel, winemaker John Hamel II and farm manager Maria Hamel outside their seasonal Port Royal home Thursday.

DOROTHY EDWARDS/STAFF



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## Naples Winter Wine Festival

“Eighty to 90 percent of our winemaking happens in the vineyards. We don't believe in doing a lot of things to the wine — we want to make sure they let the vineyards speak for themselves.”

George Hamel III, about Hamel Family Wines



DOROTHY EDWARDS/STAFF

Dawn Agnew, left, Hamel Family Wines director of hospitality, and operations manager Kirstie Dyer make preparations Thursday in the Hamel family's Port Royal home.

### HAMELS from 1A

dinners Friday, a black-and-gold-and-candlelight event hosted by Anne Welsh McNulty.

Hamel Family Wines is introducing its wines in a big way, having flown in six luminary chefs for the dinner. Each will create one course — and a delicious undercurrent of marketing for the Hamel Family Wines lot at the wine festival's high-ticket auction Saturday.

The winery has donated “A Toast from Coast to Coast,” which includes dinners at the restaurants of each of those power toques: Gary Danko, Emily Luchetti, Nancy Oakes and Craig Stoll, all of San Francisco; Patrick O'Connell, of The Inn at Little Washington in Virginia; and Tory Miller, of L'Etoile in Madison, Wisconsin.

“It's exciting to be hosting, but this is another step up with these six chefs,” George Hamel Jr. said Thursday.

It's his hope the cuisine's buzz will stir up more noise for the bidding. What the family especially likes, said George Hamel III, the winery's managing director, is that “all the money stays here in Collier County, and that part is really important. Being asked

to be vintners at the Naples Winter Wine Festival is such a big honor to us because of what it does for children.”

The younger George, now 31, attended Vineyards Elementary and The Community School of Naples. So did his younger brother, John, 29, who now is winemaker for the company.

“My parents still have a lot of friends here, and I do, too,” George Hamel III said.

They also have friends in Naples they might not know personally. Hamel Family Wines operates on a different philosophy than many, selling its 4,000-case production largely through its own three-tiered wine club. Membership includes not only specific numbers of cases of wine each year, but exclusive events around the country, such as a private showing at the Telluride Film Festival. A good number of its club members are Neapolitans, Hamel said.

They also supply selected restaurants, including Bleu Provence and Ridgway's, among several others in Naples. (The Wine Cellar of Naples at Mercato also carries their wines by the bottle.) At their winery, tastings are events, with reservations required.

“We don't want to be everywhere,” Hamel said. “We just want to be in the best restaurants.”

Day-to-day operations of the na-

### [naplesnews.com/winefestival](http://naplesnews.com/winefestival)

See more photos and find more coverage on the Naples Winter Wine Festival.

scent winery have been passed to him and his brother. But the whole family, including John Hamel's wife, Maria, are involved in the production of wines they want to be earthborn and earth-friendly.

“Eighty to 90 percent of our winemaking happens in the vineyards. We don't believe in doing a lot of things to the wine — we want to make sure they let the vineyards speak for themselves,” George Hamel III said of its 45 acres of vineyards. That means before the grapes, the ground is critical; talk to the Hamels and you'll hear about the soil.

To keep fit that terroir and the old vines they were fortunate to buy, the family also operates a farm that supplies its needs. They grow their own natural fertilizers and providing pollinators. There are cows, sheep and beehives on the family's 124-acre estate, and cover crops in between growing seasons. Another side venture is its olive orchard; a first pressing was this year.

“You can call me the farm manager,” declared Maria Hamel, smiling Thursday as her fellow Hamels

puzzled over titles with “biodynamics” in them. That farm is critical to its success. Hamel Family Wines has, within its first six years, been able to achieve organic status from both the state of California and the USDA.

“We're OCD about that,” Hamel said. “We like total control all the way from the ground into the bottle.”

Total control, Pamela Hamel noted wistfully, will not include the weather. The family converted its garage in to a six-chef kitchen for the event, under the wine company's own executive chef, and brought in their hospitality director, Dawn Agnew, as the Swiss clockwork gear for details.

But the gray skies and threats of colder weather were worrying them.

“We didn't get a tent for the garden,” fretted Hamel Jr., a recently retired investment firm partner.

The food, and the wine, and the treat of Bruce Hornsby as the after-dinner entertainment should banish any cold. Hamel Family Wines also is teaming with the Staglin Family Vineyard in wine presentation for this dinner, which the younger George Hamel is excited about.

“They have been coming to the festival so long and they are such great people, that for us, it will be like having mentors just to watch them,” he said.

## Past wine fest winners recount the thrills of victory

By Dave Osborn

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Paul Schanck spent \$110,000 last year to win a Naples Winter Wine Festival auction experience in Florence, Italy, but it's tough to put a price tag on amore.

The Naples businessman said he flew to the city known for romance last fall with his son and his son's fiancée. Schanck said he was fed up with dating after being married three times.

“I decided I'm not taking anyone to Florence with me,” said Schanck, chairman of the Jacksonville-based Stellar Recovery Inc., which owns pizza franchises and real estate and also is a collections agency.

“We go there, we're having a great time, visiting different vineyards, traveling through the wine

country of Italy.”

Part of the experience was dinner on the famous medieval stone Ponte Vecchio bridge.

“I was tired, I was exhausted,” recalled Schanck, 61. “I was on the way to my the dinner thinking, I just want to stay in my hotel room tonight.”

But an attractive woman, Angela Whitmore, introduced herself, he said.

“I thought, oh, my gosh, here we go again,” Schanck said.

Instead, he said, he found the love of his life.

“We sat there for three or four hours and engaged in conversation over and over again,” Schanck said.

“From the moment I left there, we kept texting and emailing each other constantly.”

Whitmore is a native of Great



Francis Rooney

“She never thought she'd meet anyone,” Schanck said. “I went on this trip thinking I'm never dating again, I'm sick of the games.”

On the other hand, Francis Rooney said he didn't find love during his auction excursion, but he found something just as priceless: knowledge.

Rooney paid \$340,000 for a private tour of Gettysburg with filmmaker and historian Ken Burns.

Britain but lives in Florence and holds British and Canadian passports, as she also has a home in Vancouver, British Columbia. She's also been married three times — her last husband died six years ago.

Burns narrated the tour of the famous Civil War battlefield in Pennsylvania last fall for Rooney, his wife, Kathleen, and daughter Kathleen.

Rooney — who served as U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See from 2005 to 2008 — said he thought he knew about history. But spending a day with Burns was profound.

“He radically increased me and my family's understanding of Gettysburg and perspective of the Civil War,” said the Naples resident, who is chairman of Rooney Holdings.

Burns drove them through Gettysburg, and they would stop at various spots so Burns could discuss the significance of each site, Rooney said. One special place where Burns spoke was the site of President Abraham

Lincoln's famous Gettysburg Address in 1863.

“We stood there and we read and talked about some of the circumstances surrounding President Lincoln's speech,” Rooney said. “It was very moving and certainly thought-provoking.”

“The greatest thing about the day was his charitable instincts,” Rooney added.

“I think we will see more interest from Ken Burns, perhaps in the future, as he sees the important work of the wine festival in Naples.”

Like Rooney, Schanck said the auction lot was well worth the price, especially since he met his soul mate.

“We're pretty happy,” Schanck said. “We feel like this is our last stop. We don't want any more stops in our lives.”