

# Reflections on the 2013 Naples Winter Wine Festival

## SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY

It's been a couple weeks since the 13th annual Naples Winter Wine Festival raised more than \$8.6 million for children's charities throughout Collier County. Several participants of the festival, which is the fundraising arm of Naples Children & Education Foundation, share their reflections on the weekend.

■ Gaele Andre, a 16-year-old junior at Lely High School, attends the after-school program at Boys & Girls Club of Collier County, which receives Wine Fest proceeds. She was invited to sing the national anthem at Meet the Kids Day.



LOUIS VENNE / COURTESY PHOTO

**Gaele Andre sings the national anthem at Meet the Kids Day.**

Most nerve-wracking moment: I was kind of nervous, but after I got up there to sing, it was pretty cool. I had met many of the people when they came over to the Boys & Girls Club's booth to ask about the activities that we do after

school.

Lasting impression: While I was singing, I looked at faces, and they looked very proud ... I got a standing ovation. I was happy, and I was proud of myself.

Biggest surprise: One of the festival's sponsors, NetJets, heard me sing and surprised me with tickets to the Justin Bieber concert the next day in Miami. I was in shock. I was screaming and running around I was so excited. My Boys & Girls Club mentor, Miss Lizzie, and I sat in the 10th row and were eye-level with the stage. We also got to meet him. How many girls can say they got to meet Justin Bieber face-to-face? When it was our turn, he said, "What's up?" and we got our picture taken. I showed it to some friends later, and I think they were mad and happy."

■ Rusty Staub, a former baseball star and longtime philanthropist, has attended all 13 Naples Winter Wine Festivals.

Festival highlight: It's always wonder-



MILA BRIDGER / COURTESY PHOTO

**Rusty Staub (left) greets Jim Dixon as Laura Dixon watches the auction.**

ful to participate in one of the great charity events in the country. When

organizations talk about how the festival helps them ... that day when we meet the kids and charities ... that's a highlight for me. This year, I met Ivan, the young man who spoke about raising his two nephews. I've done something personal for him, which made me feel good. The second thing this year that stands out is that friends honored me by spending a lot of money for the wine lot I donated.

Made me laugh and smile: I always kid everybody that I wish I could get a pint of Valerie Gargiulo's blood and inject it into my system. I'd live to be 100. She's got so much energy. (Ms. Gargiulo, an NCEF trustee, is known for enthusiastically cheering on bidders throughout the auction.)

Biggest surprise: You realize how incredible it is to raise more than \$8 million to help kids? The reaction from people (about raising less this year than in 2012), they have missed the point about what charity is.

■ Jeffrey Ahren, Legal Aid Service of Collier County director of development/pro bono coordinator, was a first-time festival volunteer this year. He heads the NCEF-funded Legal Aid for Collier Kids, serving children suffering from abuse, neglect and domestic violence in the home.

Biggest impression: I volunteered on auction day for security detail and got a taste and flavor for the entire proceedings ... Everything was geared to having a fun time, yet you could see everyone knew they were there for a higher purpose and cause. There was an esprit de corp that shined through and made a fun day even more meaningful.

Lot amazement: Each auction lot was



MARISA LANE / COURTESY PHOTO

**Sharon and Chuck Hallberg at Meet the Kids Day**

stand-alone spectacular. To sit there and listen for over five hours to one amazing lot and package after another and see paddles go up in the air for astounding totals was amazing.

Amusing moment: Auctioneer Humphrey Butler was hilarious and wildly entertaining. From the good-natured prodding, it was clear he was good at stoking the competitive fires in the room.

Parting thought: The patrons and donors pull off a miracle every year for Collier County ... I hope it goes on forever, but nobody should take it for granted.

# REFLECTIONS

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■ Sharon Hallberg became an NCEF trustee with her husband Chuck in fall 2012.

Most emotional experience: What really triggered my emotions was the mother on Meet the Kids Day who presented the consequences of mental health issues for her son. The fact that he has no friends, no invitations to birthday parties and all the things he misses out on ... That was probably the toughest on the emotional side.

Electric vibe: We attended the Vintner Dinner at the home of Anne Welsh McNulty, who co-hosted with Ann and Bill Bain Jr. The air was just electric there. This is our fifth festival, and these were the most fun-loving dinner guests I've ever seen.

Auction highlight: We won the “Star

Date” lot (a visit to Domaine Serene Winery in Oregon and dinner with William Shatner). We wanted to bid since we hadn't been to Domaine Serene Winery and they produce one of our favorite wines ... We're also long-time Trekkies and loved William Shatner in “Boston Legal.”

■ Vintner Dick Grace of Grace Family Vineyards and his wife, Ann, have participated in the festival since 2001.

Transcendent memory: My favorite moment transcends all 13 years. There were five of us at the first Meet the Kids Day, and this year to see so many people (175 guests and 100 children) ... The reason we stay with this auction is that it has made a palpable difference in ... Naples for our brothers and sisters who didn't have life's basic services, and now they do. That's why we come back. They (NCEF trustees) stayed the course and are making a profound difference. I only wish our politicians were as effective. ■



Vintner Dick Grace greets kids at Meet the Kids Day.

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