

# Vintage Magic



On stage at Saturday's live auction, anything can happen, from gravity-defying tricks to stratospheric bids. Seeing the kids up there gives the audience a reason to dig deep and donate big, and volunteer Dana Gilligan (inset) collects a winning bid card.

AN UNDISPUTED TRIUMPH IN THIS CHAPTER OF THE CITY'S HISTORY IS THE **NAPLES WINTER WINE FESTIVAL**—A THREE-DAY AFFAIR THAT HAS BECOME THE WORLD'S MOST SUCCESSFUL CHARITY WINE EVENT. SIX INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE BEHIND THE SCENES SHARE THEIR SPELLBINDING STORIES.

BY DOROTHEA HUNTER SÖNNE

In 2000, 36 friends teamed up with the idea to raise money to help local kids and needed a platform to do it. From that, the Naples Winter Wine Festival was born, and since then it has poured in record amounts of dollars—\$12.2 million in 2012 alone—to the Naples Children & Education Foundation (NCEF), the nonprofit its founders started to provide a framework for putting on the weekend gala and distributing its proceeds to underprivileged and at-risk Collier County youth.

Now, 13 years later, the NCEF is governed by 52 active trustees, with 32 emeritus trustees and seven honorary trustees (that collective group includes the majority of the original 36). The expected nearly 600 attendees at this year's extravaganza January 25-27 will enjoy highlights like the heartwarming Meet the Kids Day tour,

intimate vintner dinners prepared by celebrity chefs, a live auction with truly eye-popping prizes and the Celebration Brunch on Sunday.

But the biggest difference between this function and others of its kind is that on auction day, where bids flow as freely as wine, 100 percent of proceeds is donated to the charities served by NCEF. That's only possible because of the serious commitment and generosity of the trustees, who pledge time, resources and finances in the way of attending regular meetings, hosting vintner dinners in their homes, and sourcing and donating auction prizes. In anticipation of the 2013 festival, we asked a few of these movers and shakers to reminisce about their thirst to be involved and what has left an enduring impression.



TOM HARBER



Culinary stars, such as Wolfgang Puck, and renowned winemakers fly in to donate their wizard-like skills and sublime vino for Friday night vintner dinners in the NCEF trustees' homes.



Scenes from previous festivals (from top): attendee Shelly Stayer makes a bid; 2012 co-chairs Bob and Joan Clifford with honored vintner HRH Prince Robert of Luxembourg; Humphrey Butler engages auction guests.

## Grape Returns

**W**hen Ann Colgin wielded her gavel last January to kick off the bidding for prize lot No. 30, coined the “Treasure Chest” by trustees, she had no idea what would unfold. A vintner by trade and owner of Colgin Cellars in Napa Valley, she had volunteered to stand behind the podium at the Naples Winter Wine Festival’s capstone event for the twelfth year in a row—its live auction.

She had seen much since the very first showdown in early 2001, but this was something for the books. A historic collection of Château Haut-Brion wines (the oldest of the first growths of Bordeaux) was up for grabs and its donor, the head of the famous estate, HRH Prince Robert of Luxembourg, was in the audience. As she inched further up, two bidders became locked in a dead heat. Her heart started to race. She ventured “\$550,000” then paused. Before she knew it, Prince Robert stood up and offered to donate a second identical prize—but only if both buyers would pay that amount. A stroke of her gavel later, Colgin netted \$1.1 million for Collier County kids.

Consider that was one of 67 total prize lots, and you get a sense of the significance. “Everyone went crazy when that happened,” Colgin says. “Those bottles are so rare, but that’s the feeling encouraged in this environment.”

Anyone who has been to the event knows the weekend is fueled by the finest nectar of the gods and ambrosial celebrity-chef dinners, but the real reason people pay the \$8,500 per couple ticket fee is for a chance to wave their paddles under an enormous tent on the lawn of The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples. Sure, the lots are sweet, like the one Colgin was focused on that night, but the crowd cares about the bigger picture.

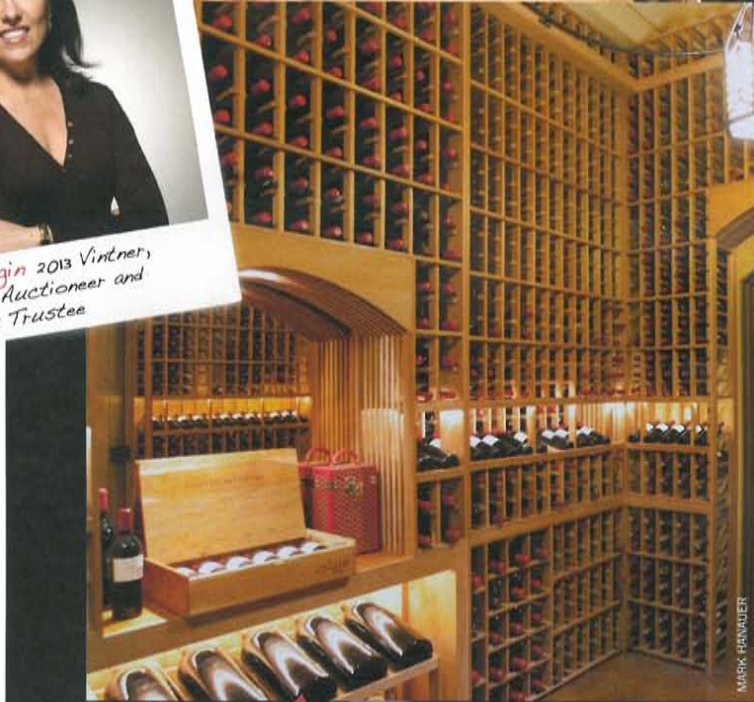
“I’m in awe of the generosity of the people in Naples. I’ve donated my time as a charity auctioneer throughout my career, and at most events, people look at the value of the prizes and don’t go higher than that with the bidding. One of the great things I see here—and nowhere else—is that friends egg each other on in spirited competition to raise more and more,” Colgin says.

She’s retiring from the podium this year (“I’ve done it for so long; we need new life”); however, she will continue to be involved as one of the participating vintners, donating wines for a dinner and an auction prize.

While most of her memories have been up on stage, she’s looking forward to walking away as an audience member with a whole new set of them.



*Ann Colgin 2013 Vintner,  
Founding Auctioneer and  
Honorary Trustee*



*This special room in Colgin Cellars exclusively houses wines for philanthropic donations.*



**Top:** Colgin at the Lutgerts’ 2010 vintner dinner. **Right:** A seasoned auctioneer, she knows how to whip up the crowd to bid high and often.

## Colgin's Favorite Prize Lots of All Time

"I've always loved the ones that have involved wine. Some of what does best are cars, art, and trips, but it's great for me to see people battle it out over the best wines in the world."

■ **24** – She and her husband donated this lot, which fetched \$320,000 in 2008 for 24 bottles of 2004 Colgin Cellars wines plus a walk-on role on the TV series *24* and a private dinner with the two of them.

■ **Perfection** – This prize was an assembly of 100 bottles, all from different vintners, and each having achieved a 100-point score from the *Wine Advocate* or the *Wine Spectator*, something that would have been impossible for one vintner to assemble solo. "It's really important to note the generosity of vintners from around the world. These auction items involve a lot of personal time and are expensive to put together."

■ **Treasure Chest** – "I sold this historic lot at the 2012 festival to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Dillon family owning Château Haut-Brion," Colgin says about this cache, which had 20 bottles of the vineyard's finest vintages enclosed in a handcrafted wooden console designed by David Linley stocked with engraved wine carafes and glasses.



TOM HARBER

Colgin's husband Joe Wender (right) on auction night with emeritus trustees Scott and Simone Lutger. In years past, Wender would often surprise Colgin by going in on group prizes and have a friend hold up his paddle.



LOUIS YENNE



ERIK KELLAR



ERIK KELLAR

Left: Bob and Joan Clifford flank Colgin and chef Wolfgang Puck at a 2012 vintner dinner. Above: Colgin, Clifford and others prepare the wines to be poured later on that same night.

## Coupled for Change

Lifelong Floridians Jeff Gargiulo and his wife, Valerie Boyd, bought property in Napa in the 1990s to start Gargiulo Vineyards but maintained their home in Naples and a deep connection to the community. They, with friends of theirs, wanted to figure out a way to give back.

“There’s a group of us who came together. We all shared a passion for wine and food, and we wanted to make a profound difference in the lives of children in Collier County. We talked about this common bond we had and how could we use it to make a difference,” Boyd says.

The couple had a taste of Auction Napa Valley and thought, why not bring a winter auction to Florida? They invited about 12 couples to a casual backyard gathering at their home on Galleon Drive one Sunday afternoon in January 2000 to discuss their options. “I remember it well,” Gargiulo says. “We iced down some wines and had a table full of cheese and charcuterie. We sat around the table and talked. By 4 p.m. we made the decision we were going to do this. That’s when I went into my cellar and got a rare bottle of wine—Screaming Eagle, which had just become famous—and we made a toast.”

The casual Sunday meetings continued throughout the year for the group that grew to be the 36 founders. Something novel and what made the NCEF different was that after that first day, each couple pledged to put a certain amount of money in the bank so that the event was totally underwritten by the trustees. Says Boyd, “It was important from day one that all the money on auction day go to the children.”

Other things Gargiulo did as the first festival chair to set it apart were personal touches like flying in the invited vintners, and having each trustee get 10 friends from out of town to attend. Setting precedents like that fostered an intimate crowd while cultivating outside interest.

“We didn’t want it to just be where we went back to the same general local businesses year after year. We wanted to broaden it, we wanted to bring people in from across the country because that’s how we got a ton of guests that first year and continued to grow,” he says.

Keeping the format of the auction on the smaller side (not exceed-



*Valerie Boyd & Jeff Gargiulo  
Founding Trustees and  
2013 Vintners*

ing too many attendees and too many prizes) was at the suggestion of friend Ann Colgin. The fellow vintner worked with Gargiulo to coordinate the festival down to a new tradition: Every time an auction lot was awarded, a rock song was played. “Nobody had ever heard anything like that, and it created a lot of energy,” he says.

Also what happened at that first go-round—a suggestion from Dick Grace of Grace Family Vineyards, a vintner who has participated in every festival to date—was having speakers on stage from the local charities that would receive money from NCEF, which wound up being a precursor to Meet the Kids Day (where guests visit the nonprofits). Says Gargiulo of that moment: “There wasn’t a dry eye in the house after those children spoke. You could feel the electricity in that room when those kids said their piece and the gavel came down. It really transformed the auction from being one where people thought about trying to figure out what they were going to buy and get a deal to ‘I want to contribute money to help these kids.’”



**Left:** Gargiulo, who headed up the first-ever festival, started what would become a photo trend for future chairs when he jumped in a wine tub on a whim. **Above:** A music lover, he puts together a band each year for the Wine Down Event, a party after the auction Saturday.



LOUIS VEVINE

*Dick Grace, a friend and festival vintner from the beginning, was emphatic about showing attendees how their donations make a difference. His vision paved the way for Meet the Kids Day.*

## A Good Fight

They laugh about it now, but in 2008 when Bob and Terry Edwards, the current festival co-chairs, were invited to attend the event for the first time, it stirred a fight that ruined Bob's favorite Sunday ritual. The couple has a habit of going out for brunch and reading *The New York Times*, which that morning ended with a long, quiet car ride home.

"I had heard so many great things about the festival and the foundation—how deeply committed to philanthropy its members were and the spirit of giving that carried through the weekend. I felt it was something both of us would enjoy being a part of," Terry says.

Bob wasn't so convinced. A managing director of Moran Edwards Asset Management Group, he was having trouble getting past the seemingly crazy economics of the situation. Approaching the weekend from a financial advisor's standpoint and being naturally wired to find value in investments, he didn't understand why people overbid. It seemed absurd to him to pay \$1 million for a car when the max it was worth was \$300,000.

Eventually Bob caved in and agreed to go with Terry to the festival. "I wanted to make her happy and didn't want to let her down. I was reluctant but at the same time a bit curious," he says.

The tide started to change at Meet the Kids Day. That year's included a tour of the brand new NCEF Pediatric Dental Center, which resulted from a 2005 needs-assessment study commissioned by the NCEF showing 17,000 Collier children lacked basic oral care. The expansive facility offered top-of-the-line services and care.

"I couldn't believe it," Bob says. "Not only was this nicer than where I go to get my teeth cleaned, but I was impressed that the festival team was able to raise the money to provide this type of care to children *and* supervise the construction of the facility in such a short period of time."

Next up was Ron and Barbara Balsler's vintner dinner. As soon as the Edwards walked onto the terrace of the penthouse condo and saw Philippe Starck acrylic ghost chairs and dry ice that cast an ethereal mist over the balcony, they were floored. "It felt like we were in the clouds. That night we had the best time, and it was the beginning of several friendships we hold dear today," Terry says.

Then Saturday at the auction, upon hearing the incessant chants of "it's all for the kids" (the unofficial mantra of the trustees that's always shouted in full force during the bidding)—and reflecting on the experiences of the previous day—Bob fully realized the value in what people paid for the auction lots. Not long afterwards, the couple joined the NCEF.

Things have progressed quickly for them: Since becoming trustees, less than three years later they volunteered to run the festival. As the 2013 chairs, they've practically been thinking about January 25-27 every waking minute for the past 12 months.

Funny how life works sometimes. In this case, they agree it was for the best.

Bob shares a smile with one of the children at last year's Meet the Kids Day.



Terry & Bob Edwards  
2013 Naples Winter Wine Festival  
Chairs and Trustees



TOM HARPER



In 2009, a visit to the brand new NCEF Pediatric Dental Center (above: its medical team accepts an award in 2012) and going to Ron and Barbara Balsler's stunning dream-like vintner dinner (below) motivated the couple to consider joining the group.



### 2013 Auction Lots the Edwards Are Most Excited About

As festival co-chairs, they supervised gathering the prizes up for grabs, spending many hours brainstorming and sourcing. Some top-notch picks:

- A four-night trip to Scotland for eight gents, with fishing, hunting, whiskey, golf at St. Andrews and a helicopter ride over Edinburgh.
- The *Dancing with the Stars* package with lessons from the TV pros in Bel Air and tickets to the show's finale.
- Château Mouton Rothschild's complete vertical, with one bottle from each year from 1945 to 2009, the most comprehensive collection to be offered at auction to date from the legendary French house.



Often the first on the dance floor, McNulty boogies with revelers at her 2011 beach-themed bash (from left: McNulty, Linda Sonders, daughter Brynne McNulty and Andrea McLendon).



One of McNulty's many memorable past dinners was the 2011 soiree, "Uncork Good Vibrations," she held with the Bains. Coastal decor in and out of her house set the tone, a Beach Boys cover band entertained the lively crowd and vintner Mary Novak of Spottswoode led guests in a late-night conga line.



## Working Hard and Having Fun



Anne Welsh McNulty  
NCEF Board Chair and Trustee



←  
*She hosts vintner dinners with her friends Ann and Bill Bain. "Everyone knows our party will go the longest; we have a tradition of dancing," McNulty says.*

### McNulty Explains the Grant Process

The nine trustees who sit on the grant committee in three-year terms take their commitment seriously. "We're extremely professional and disciplined. We really try to act that way because we have a long-term responsibility to both those who give us money and those who rely on that money," McNulty says.

In the roughly 10 hours each week the committee members devote towards their work reviewing grant applications and attending frequent meetings, the process has two parts—the annual grant cycle and strategic initiatives. The annual cycle is how individual organizations apply for funds. The committee reads and reviews them and selects on average 25 beneficiaries for each year.

The strategic initiatives platform was hatched after a 2005 University of Florida NCEF-commissioned study showed gaps in child care in the county. These programs bring together several nonprofits to address a broader problem over three to five years. One such push was the building of the dental center in 2008, and a current one is HUGS, a mental-health coalition linking local groups like NAMI Collier County and the David Lawrence Center. "We try to think big and set audacious goals—and make them happen," she says.

Climbing the ladder at Goldman Sachs is no easy feat. Wall Street savvy and board room acumen are what propelled Anne Welsh McNulty to the top before she retired as a managing director in late 2001. But what she couldn't have guessed was that the same finance-world skill set she had would soon come into play elsewhere.

It was January 2003 when she and her late husband John arrived in Naples to look at houses. They wanted to relocate to Florida and had toured several cities, but none were the right fit. McNulty, a perky, whip-smart blonde with a vivacious side, needed to make sure she was placing herself somewhere where nightly bingo wasn't the sole stimulation. "We wanted to be around younger, like-minded people. We didn't want to go to bed at 9."

Karen Van Arsdale from emeritus trustee Scott Lutgert's Premier Sotheby's International Realty showed them the town. She called Lutgert on the spot and said, "I think you should invite these people to your home tonight."

One vintner dinner and auction later, and the McNultys were hooked on Naples. They became involved in the foundation pretty much when they signed the papers for their house. "We got to know Scott that weekend, and attending the festival was a very compelling argument to move here," she says.

In addition to heading the NCEF board of trustees, she previously led the grant committee, the branch of the organization that determines which charities receive funds raised at the auction. She also loves planning the yearly vintner dinners she co-hosts with friends Ann and Bill Bain. "The festival itself is a creative and joyful way to raise money," she says. "And one of the most fun things we trustees get to do is throw those parties." ♦