

Chuck Halberg and Tom Moran look on as Sandi Moran presents Marchese Piero Antinori with the Honored Vintner Award.



A Desire to Help

THE NAPLES WINTER WINE FESTIVAL POURS ON THE CHARITY

by Christopher Miller, MS

PHOTO: MILA BRIDGER



Table décor from the 2015 festival.

THE NAPLES WINTER WINE FESTIVAL IS, SIMPLY PUT, one of the most profound charity wine auction events in the world. Every January for the past 15 years, dozens of top chefs, vintners and sommeliers from around the world gather for three days in Collier County, Florida to help raise funds benefitting more than 200,000 underprivileged youth.

Upon arrival, the charity's participants are ushered to "home base" at the Ritz-Carlton in Naples. Over 400 volunteers are on hand to service the 550 guests each year, pouring an incredible amount of some of the world's very best wines.

As a sommelier, the most prominent duties are preparing and pouring wines at the Friday night series of celebrity chef dinners and the Saturday afternoon auction. The dinners, capped at an intimate 40 or so attendees, are generally hosted at various trustee homes throughout the city. In attendance are winery representatives—often the owners and/or winemakers—who introduce and discuss their wines during the seven-plus course meals the chefs have specially put together for the night.

The Saturday afternoon auction would almost qualify as over-the-top if it weren't for such a great cause. The organizers of the event have assembled a massive collection of the world's greatest wines, and they are poured with abandon. Additionally, sommeliers assist at the various auction tables where many guests have supplemented the event with a plethora of special bottles from their own cellars.

You get the feeling that everyone is there for the same goal, the right reasons and the level of charitable contributions is hard to comprehend. A large gathering of very bright, successful industry leaders joining together to celebrate food and wine with a tangible, almost maniacal desire to help those in need—that's what Naples is all about. **SJ**

Auctioneer
Humphrey
Butler.

PHOTO: LOUIS VEVINE

