

# Top U.S. Charity Wine Auctions

High spirits and innovation mark the 2016 live events, despite revenue dips

BY VICTORIA SADOSKY

After several years of growth for the highest-earning charity wine auctions in the United States, revenues decreased in 2016, with live-auction bids reaching \$33 million, compared with \$36.9 million in 2015.

Naples Winter Wine Festival held its No. 1 ranking, raising nearly \$10.5 million in live-auction bids. "It's a team effort. We try to be innovative not only in our auction lots but also in the vintners we bring in," said co-chair Sandi Moran. Top lots included a 2016 Rolls-Royce, which sold for \$750,000, and an exclusive experience at the BottleRock music festival in Napa, at \$720,000.

Runner-up Auction Napa Valley totaled \$9.8 million, with top lots including a wine and safari experience in South Africa that brought in just over \$1 million, and three Realm salmanazars (\$210,000).

"There is nothing like seeing these lots sold, where maybe it goes from \$20,000 to \$100,000 in seconds," said ANV marketing vice president Stacey Dolan Capitani.

The Sonoma Harvest Wine Auction, which earlier this year severed ties with longtime partner Sonoma Valley Vintners and Growers Alliance, raises money to improve local third graders' reading skills. In



Live-auction bidders at the Destin Charity Wine Auction in Miramar Beach, Fla.

2016, the auction offered a dinner provided by *Wine Spectator* Award of Excellence-winning John Ash & Co. at Kosta Browne Wines, which sold for \$200,000.

Joel Cowley, president of Rodeo Uncorked!, attributed the decline in that auction's earnings to the local Houston economy. "We were down 26 percent on auction night," he said. "But when you look at the fair market value of what we are selling, it's still pretty phenomenal."

However, several auctions saw strengthened revenues, including Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation, which reached the top three for the first time, raising \$2.4 million in live-auction bids. President John Russell commended the community's generosity. "If we build a house for Habitat for Humanity, we know the family moving into it, we meet the parents of

the autistic children [through our work with Emerald Coast Autism Center], we hear their stories," said Russell.

At the Emeril Lagasse Foundation's *Carnivale du Vin* in New Orleans, focused on mentoring youth in the culinary arts, children take an active part in the auction itself, including helping to prepare a multicourse meal for the event. "Not only are we introducing our donors to the people that are benefiting, but also teaching the kids along the way," said foundation president Brian Kish.

To celebrate *Carnivale du Vin*'s 12th anniversary, baseball legend Rusty Staub donated a 54-bottle collection of *grands* and *premiers crus* Burgundies. It was the night's top wine-only lot, selling for \$55,000. "Every year, Rusty Staub puts together a great Burgundy

package. He and Emeril have such great respect for one another," Kish said.

Despite being edged out of the Top 10, the Detroit International Wine Auction, which funds scholarships at the local College for Creative Studies, raised \$1.1 million in live bids.

It is worth noting that younger generations are beginning to have a role in events long supported by their elders. This year, Auction Napa Valley's honorary chair was Agustin Huneus, whose father held the title over 20 years ago.

"You see second-, third-, even fourth-generation vintners hosting our guests and putting these amazing wines up for auction," said Patsy McGaughy, director of communications. "Our vintners are [bringing] their kids to see this tradition of philanthropy, so that's been a fun evolution."

Amid the spirit of celebration and generosity, the auctions at times also became emotional. At the Sonoma Harvest Wine Auction, vintner Gina Gallo requested a moment of silence in honor of Margrit Mondavi, who died in September. As executive director Maureen Cottingham said, "It truly is about the vintners and growers always looking forward, always looking to the future, but also looking into the past and honoring those who have come before us." □

## 2016 TOP 10 CHARITY WINE AUCTIONS

EVENT	BENEFICIARIES	LOCATION	LIVE BIDS*
<b>Naples Winter Wine Festival</b>	Naples Children & Education Foundation	Naples, Fla.	<b>\$10,485,000</b>
<b>Auction Napa Valley</b>	Local health and children's organizations	St. Helena, Calif.	<b>\$9,800,000</b>
<b>Destin Charity Wine Auction</b>	Children's charities in northwest Florida	Miramar Beach, Fla.	<b>\$2,359,225</b>
<b>Sonoma Harvest Wine Auction</b>	Various in Sonoma County	Kenwood, Calif.	<b>\$1,862,500</b>
<b>Southwest Florida Wine &amp; Food Fest</b>	Gosilano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida and others	Miramar Lakes, Fla.	<b>\$1,549,584</b>
<b>Rusty Staub Foundation Wine Auction Dinner</b>	Rusty Staub Emergency Food Pantry	New York	<b>\$1,524,350</b>
<b>Classic Wines Auction</b>	Children and family charities	Portland, Ore.	<b>\$1,514,565</b>
<b>V Foundation Wine Celebration</b>	V Foundation for Cancer Research	Oakville, Calif.	<b>\$1,377,850</b>
<b>Rodeo Uncorked! Champion Wine Auction &amp; Dinner</b>	Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo	Houston	<b>\$1,304,500</b>
<b>Emeril Lagasse Foundation's Carnivale du Vin</b>	Emeril Lagasse Foundation	New Orleans	<b>\$1,187,200</b>
<b>TOTAL OF TOP 10 CHARITIES</b>			<b>\$32,964,774</b>

\*Each year, *Wine Spectator* tracks the results of charity wine auctions in the United States. These auctions have multiple revenue streams, from ticket sales, corporate sponsorships and silent and live auctions. For the purpose of comparison, the auctions are ranked by their self-reported live-auction totals.