

# Auction Napa Valley Raises \$13.6 Million for Charity in Its 38th Year

The annual event offered glitz, glam and a ride with Danica Patrick, but also support for those impacted by last year's wine-country wildfires



Photo by: Alexander Rubin for Napa Valley Vintners

Napa vintners (including Danica Patrick, in white dress) joined singer Michael Franti on stage for a post-auction performance.

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There was plenty of glitz and glamour at the 38th rendition of Auction Napa Valley, the Napa Valley Vintners' (NVV) charity wine event, held May 31 to June 2. But there was also recognition of the trying times the region has faced since the devastating fires of last fall and of the many lives touched by the blazes. Overall, the weekend's events raised \$13.6 million for local charities that help community health programs and childhood education efforts. That was a drop from the \$15.7 million raised last year.

As a coda to the weekend's festivities, \$2.36 million was raised from the auction's final lot, a fund-a-need lot benefiting Napa Valley Vintners' Fund-the-Future program. Donations in increments from \$5,000 to \$100,000 were hammered down in a cascade of fundraising that was cheered on by a stage packed with gleeful youngsters from local chapters of the Boys & Girls Club. Such organizations were critical to supporting family and children in need following the wildfires.

The event's biggest wine lot was donated by Opus One. The winery offered four imperials of Opus One dating to 1979, as well as a trip to France filled with wining and dining at some of Paris' top restaurants and an 18th-century themed masquerade ball at the Palace of Versailles. After a winning bid of \$700,000 was made, Opus One doubled the lot, bringing in an additional \$700,000 from a second bidder for a total of \$1.4 million.

The highest single bid was \$1 million for a lot sponsored by the NVV and Lexus for a weeklong excursion to the U.S. Open golf tournament at Pebble Beach next June, including exclusive wining, dining and golfing activities, as well as 18 magnums of Napa Valley wines.

Overall, the live auction raised just over \$11 million, a dip from last year's \$11.6 million total, according to tracking by *Wine Spectator*. (NVV does not publicly disclose separate fundraising totals for live, barrel and online auctions.) The event is second only to the Naples Winter Wine Festival among top American charity wine auctions so far this year.

Auction Napa Valley was held at the Meadowood resort in St. Helena, its home since the first auction in 1981. More than 900 people packed a huge circus tent that was air-conditioned amid the 99° F heat. Besides the 32-lot live auction on Saturday, there was also a barrel auction, held Friday at Charles Krug Winery. The top lot was a case of VGS Château Potelle red wine, sold for \$114,300.

This year's honorary auction co-chairs were Angelina, Alycia, Riana and Giovanna Mondavi, the fourth-generation Mondavi sisters of the Peter Mondavi Sr. family. An emotional moment came Saturday when Samantha Rudd, daughter of the late vintner and culinary magnate Leslie Rudd of Rudd Oakville Estate, who died May 3, donated \$1 million on behalf of the Rudd Foundation. "Last month, before my father passed away, I made a promise to carry on," Samantha said to a standing ovation.

A lighter moment came during bidding for the 28th lot, donated by Amizetta Estate, Gamble Family Vineyards and Somnium Wine. Bidding was flagging at \$200,000 before Somnium owner (and recently retired professional racing driver) Danica Patrick decided to take matters into her own hands and add something extra to the lot.

It had included a ride at nearby Sonoma Raceway in a Toyota Camry pace car. Patrick offered a ride with her. "I think we can do better than a Camry—nothing against the Camry, but I think we can get a race car," she said to the cheering audience. Bidding soon picked up, and the lot sold for \$300,000. "I think Danica has been on stage before," said Gamble owner Tom Gamble, with a smile.

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