

## Naples Festival Tops Charity Wine Auctions in 2007

Last year's Top 10 U.S. auctions gain 13 percent over 2006 BY JENNIFER FIEDLER

The Naples Winter Wine Festival led *Wine Spectator's* 2007 list of Top 10 U.S. charity auctions for the fourth year in a row, commanding an unprecedented \$15.7 million in live bids. That's an impressive 38 percent above its live-auction total for 2006, and \$8.2 million more than the venerable Auction Napa Valley.

Naples enjoyed the largest gains in 2007, but charity wine auctions overall demonstrated their supporters' depth of commitment. The Top 10 auctions brought in \$33.6 million in live bids, \$4.4 million more than in 2006; seven of the 10 surpassed their totals from the previous year.

Each year, *Wine Spectator* tracks charity auctions that feature predominantly wine-related lots. The results are ranked according to live-auction totals, a metric chosen to compare events with multiple and diverse revenue streams. In 2007, the results of 40 charity wine auctions were tracked.

In February, with its signature recipe of boldface names and big-ticker items, the Naples auction boosted its



Naples festival volunteers, who carried butterflies to mark the event's theme, "Nature's Transformations," congratulated auction winners.

average take per lot to \$219,639, up from \$155,000. Auction coordinator Dawn Montecalvo attributed the jump to a focus on unique lots. Duplicate lots were not offered—a tactic that builds excitement for each individual package and has helped increase revenue in the past.

The strategy worked. Auction-goers clamored for lots like the seven bottles of Colgin Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley

Tychson Hill Vineyard 2002 combined with a walk-on role on ABC's *Grey's Anatomy*; the lot sold for \$460,000.

Charity auctions across the nation witnessed similarly breathtaking high bids for wines. Symantec CEO John Thompson set a new record at Auction Napa Valley with a \$1.1 million bid for a lot that included trips to Napa Valley and Italy, three double magnums of Staglin Sangiovese

Napa Valley Stagliano and a new Maserati. Other standout bids included \$60,000 for seven Imperials of Washington wine at the Sun Valley Center for the Arts Auction, \$40,000 for a collection of eight California jeroboams and methuselahs at the Sonoma Paradiso auction, and \$42,000 for one magnum of the 1959 Domaine Romanée-Conti Romanée-Conti at the Mount Sinai

### Top 10 U.S. Charity Wine Auctions of 2007

EVENT	BENEFICIARIES	LOCATION	LIVE BIDS*
Naples Winter Wine Festival Auction Napa Valley	Naples Children & Education Foundation	Naples, Fla.	\$15,670,000
Sonoma Paradiso	Local charities	St. Helena, Calif.	\$7,485,000
Rusty Staub Foundation	Local children's charities	Santa Rosa, Calif.	\$1,905,500
High Museum Atlanta Wine Auction	Emergency food pantries	New York	\$1,662,000
Carnivale du Vin 2007	High Museum of Art	Atlanta	\$1,513,780
Sun Valley Center Wine Auction	Emeril Lagasse Foundation	New Orleans	\$1,290,500
Classic Wines Auction	Sun Valley Center for the Arts	Ketchum, Idaho	\$1,152,900
Wine Dinner and Auction	Children and family charities	Portland, Ore.	\$1,031,480
Central Coast Wine Classic	Mount Sinai Hospital	New York	\$1,000,000
	Local charities	San Luis Obispo, Calif.	\$881,790

\* Updated information may have revised original figures in some cases.



## Collecting



Above: Ursula Hermacinski held the gavel at Rusty Staub's auction. Top right: Auctiongoers bid at the High Museum auction. Right: A celebration at the Sun Valley Center auction.



benefit dinner in New York.

The High Museum Wine Auction and the Classic Wines Auction, familiar names in the Top 10, showed gains of \$269,080 and \$79,240, respectively. Both auctions—which offered multiday events such as wine-maker dinners and dance parties in addition to the live auction—cited increased visibility within their communities for the higher draws. The High Museum auction benefited especially from a prestigious art loan from the Louvre, which helped to raise the museum's profile.

Two New York City-based auctions proved that less can be more, by focusing on sourcing quality bottles for a small group of wine-savvy attendees. The venerable Rusty Staub Foundation Wine Auction, held at Daniel, a *Wine*

*Spectator* Grand Award winning restaurant, brought in \$1.7 million, a \$112,000 increase over 2006, to place fourth on the list. Rusty Staub expressed amazement at his success, especially since his operation is so small: "It's just me and one other guy and then a few people doing a mail-out." Anything more elaborate, though, would be beside the point: "That's not what we're trying to do."

Only 100 guests scored tickets to the Fourth Annual Mount Sinai benefit auction at the Four Seasons in New York, giving the sole newcomer to the Top 10 the distinction of having the smallest audience on the list. The auction garnered \$1 million in live bids, 91 percent more than last year, and an average bid of \$10,000 per guest. Robin Solomon, one of three

co-chairs, credited the auction's growing annual take to "a room full of high-net-worth collectors with a connection to Mount Sinai Hospital." She hopes to raise more than \$2 million in 2008 through live bids and corporate donations.

Silent auctions played a minor role in this year's successes; only six of the auctions in the Top 10 held one. *Carnivale du Vin* was a notable exception; the event surpassed the previous year's take by 44 percent, adding \$62,905 to the \$1.5 million total that it raised for the Emeril Lagasse Foundation in 2007.

Paddle raises, also known as fund-a-need lots, which raise money directly for a given charity, are not counted by *Wine Spectator* toward live-auction totals, but they proved to be effective fund-raising tools. The Classic Wines

Auction brought in a record \$830,650 from its annual paddle raise. Auctions such as the V Foundation and the Auction of Washington Wines, both of which barely missed making the Top 10, rounded up \$502,750 and \$623,000, respectively, during paddle raises.

Despite strong showings at last year's charity auctions, turbulent economic times make it difficult to predict results for 2008. There is still room for innovation, however, particularly within the realm of technology. Auction Napa Valley has found growing success with its online auction, now in its second year. The three-week-long auction concludes during the event's Friday night festivities and is bolstered by live bidding parties in New York and Chicago. This year, the 81 lots in the e-auction brought in \$379,000, a 21 percent increase over last year's totals.

The Classic Wines Auction also sported a pre-event online component. Charity auctions might adopt other creative options in the future to build anticipation and reach out to potential bidders unable to attend events in person. □

