

Cabs, glam and stylish rides drive Auction Napa Valley toward \$10 million

ST. HELENA, Calif. — Sticking with the comparatively streamlined format that worked so well last year, Auction Napa Valley, held June 7-10, raised more than \$9.8 million for local healthcare, youth services and low-income housing programs. That's a solid boost over the \$8.4 million raised in 2006, and close to the \$10.5 million all-time 2005 high.

Taken altogether, the 45 live-auction packages, 106 barrel lots and 81 on-line offerings spotlighted an extraordinary lineup of wine, vintner-hosted events and travel adventures, donated by the organization's many winery members. Although there were fewer live lots than in past years, they were packaged with more bling to attract bigger bucks. For example, a stay at the elite Yellowstone Club together with a large-format collection of three Lokoya Mountain Cabernets, draped with a Martin Katz original 3.31-carat yellow diamond necklace, glittered with even more sex appeal than usual, bringing \$140,000.

Bill Phelps, whose family and the Joseph Phelps Vineyards's team chaired the fundraiser, said he was very pleased with the outcome: "This is a tremendous showing of generosity by our bidders who come from around the world and from our community to support these charities."

Meadowood Resort, by comedian Dana Carvey. He democratically poked fun at vintners, the well-heeled and politicians. Speaker of the House and Napa Valley vineyard owner Nancy Pelosi was on the receiving end of some of his jokes, but when Carvey realized that her husband was present, he reversed course with a barrage of pandering compliments. The crowd roared and Paul Pelosi countered that it was all in good fun.

Also causing commotion was the bidding war waged over three 3-liters of Screaming Eagle; Joy Craft, last year's top donor, ultimately secured the lot for \$500,000. Hundred Acre earned honors for the highest bid — \$400,000 — for a single bottle of 2004 Cabernet, albeit an 18-liter. In addition to the Maserati, vehicles of various stripes drove other lots upward, including a lilliputian electric car packed with 125 750-mls of Spottswoode Cabernets (\$200,000); a 1941 Woodie Wagon outfitted with six 3-liters of Vineyard 7 & 8 (\$150,000); and the Vintners' Hit the Road in Style package fully loaded with 94 magnums and powered by a Lexus LS 600h L (\$360,000).

Friday's al fresco "Taste Napa Valley" extravaganza, held at Trinchero Family Estates and anchored by the indoor barrel tasting and auction, featured nib-



TOM E. SMITH



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JASON TINACCI

Above, from left: Doug Shafer's barrel of Hillside Select rolled up \$104,950 in bids; lot 39 delivered \$150,000 for six 3-liters of Vineyard 7 & 8 and a vintage Woodie; patrons John and Sandi Thompson are thanked for their largesse by vintners Garen and Shari Staglin.

This year's dramatic high point was an all-time record bid of \$1.1 million for Staglin Family Vineyards Lot 24, which included a vertical of three 3-liter bottles of Stagliano Sangiovese, and a winery tasting and luncheon fueled with a six-day epicurean driving tour through Italy with the use of two Maserati sports cars, petrol included. Bidding stalled at \$900,000, but winery owners Garen and Shari Staglin revved up interest with the perk of ownership of one of the Maseratis. When the gavel fell, the bid had zoomed to \$1.1 million and John W. Thompson, chairman of the board and CEO of Symantec Corp., was holding the keys to this high-profile lot.

Along with his wife, Sandi, Thompson had dined the evening before at Shafer Vineyards. Little did his tablemates know that this soft-spoken, third-time auction attendee from Silicon Valley would prove so competitive. Neither did he, apparently, commenting after his victory that, "We expected to be bidding, but not this high."

The Thompsons were among the 800 attendees who had been hilariously welcomed to Saturday evening's live auction, held under the tent at

bles from more than 90 restaurants and purveyors, including über-chef Thomas Keller of *French Laundry*, who scooped savory tomato water *granita* snow cones topped with a poached shrimp. This and other culinary delights were washed down with local wines poured by over 140 participating Napa wineries.

Barrel auction action raised nearly \$1.25 million, a 50 percent increase over last year, yet with virtually the same number of cases on the block. Shafer Vineyards's barrel of 2005 Hillside Select Cabernet again eclipsed the others at \$104,950. Held simultaneously, the e-auction raised nearly \$380,000, a 21 percent increase over 2006. — *Steve Pitcher*

For information on next year's event, scheduled for June 5-8, visit www.napavintners.com.

Jimmy's Gems

One-of-a-kind cuvées, large-format bottles, luxury cruises and travel to far-away places comprise some of the lots on offer for Jimmy's Gems, an online auction transpiring October 1 through 31 to benefit the Jimmy Manbach Memorial Scholarship Foundation. Proceeds will fund travel for budding wine professionals to work harvests in California.

For information or to register, visit www.jimmysgems.cmarket.com.