



**TOP CHEFS, WORLD CLASS WINES AND RECORD ATTENDANCE  
HIGHLIGHT 2<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL SONOMA WINE COUNTRY WEEKEND**

**Taste and Auction Events Filled To Capacity**

**The Three Day Series of Events, Sponsored by Visa Signature  
Raised More than \$400,000 for Local Sonoma Charities**

**Sonoma, CA (September 8, 2009) -- Sonoma Wine Country Weekend**, one of the country's most prestigious wine events and Sonoma County's largest food and wine fundraiser of the year, enjoyed record participation and attendance while raising more than \$400,000 for local Sonoma charities. The annual three-day, pre-harvest celebration – comprised of the **30th Annual Showcase: Taste of Sonoma**, the **17<sup>th</sup> Annual Sonoma Valley Harvest Wine Auction** and a series of vintner hosted lunches and dinners – shines a spotlight on Sonoma's unparalleled culinary, winemaking and hospitality heritage. In all, more than 150 wineries, 60 chefs and countless hospitality providers and volunteers took part in the annual fete that drew a record crowd from across the country and around the world in idyllic wine country weather.

"We are thrilled with both the turnout and the proceeds from this year's event," said Executive Producer **Maureen Cottingham**, "This has been a challenging year, and we didn't know quite what to expect, but everyone, from the participating wineries and chefs to the visitors who traveled here from all over the country really stepped up to make this a fabulous event for Sonoma's food and wine community and the local charities we support."

Sonoma's legendary **Sangiaco** family served as honorary chairs for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Sonoma Wine Country Weekend, underscoring this year's focus on the contributions made by Sonoma's grape growers to the historic wine region's world class standing.

For the second year in a row, **Visa Signature™** served as presenting sponsor, providing Visa Signature card owners exclusive perks and savings during the weekend's events.

**Vintner Lunch & Dinner Series** The weekend's festivities began on Friday and continued into Saturday with a sold out series of intimate vintner lunches and dinners hosted in the cellars, vineyards and dining rooms of Sonoma's premier wineries. Guests enjoyed a unique opportunity to hobnob with their favorite

winemakers and growers while enjoying feasts prepared by Sonoma's finest chefs. Some of the most coveted seatings at this year's vintner series included, **Chalk Hill Estates, Hook & Ladder, Stryker Sonoma, Tandem, Paul Hobbs, Benziger, Lancaster, Quivira** and of course, Saturday night's grand Honorary Chair Dinner hosted by the Sangiacomo family at the **Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa**.

### **Record Attendance at Showcase: Taste of Sonoma**

One of the most highly anticipated wine and food events of the year, **Showcase: Taste of Sonoma** was hosted Saturday on the grounds of the historic **MacMurray Ranch** in Healdsburg. The record capacity crowd of 2500 enjoyed a picture perfect summer day, immersing themselves in the food and wine culture of **Sonoma County**. Noted as "the largest outdoor food and wine event in California" by *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, Showcase: Taste of Sonoma featured 60 of Sonoma's best restaurants including **Cyrus, Bistro 29, Zin, El Dorado Kitchen** and **Syrah**, together with more than 150 world class wineries and countless artisan food purveyors gathered among the vines of the storied estate that was once home to the late actor **Fred MacMurray**. Wine lovers and foodies alike were treated to endless examples of Sonoma's bounty, from the **Gloria Ferrer** Bubble Lounge and Farmers Market to basket press demonstrations and sommelier-led AVA Tent tours - not to mention the unparalleled line-up of world class food and wine. For many, the highlight of the day was the **Steel Chef Competition**, which saw Sonoma's culinary masters competing for the coveted title of Sonoma County's Chef of Steel. After a neck-in-neck final round, this year's winner was **Ryan Fancher** of **Barndiva** in Healdsburg.

"We travel all over the world to wine and food events," enthused Rande Willson and Kelly Madrid of Boca Raton, FL. "and this weekend is the one we keep coming back to!"

### **Hijinks and High Bids at the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Sonoma Valley Harvest Wine Auction**

Can you say Toga Party? Sporting the tagline "Party with Us and You'll Want to Come Bacchus", the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual **Sonoma Valley Harvest Wine Auction** took place Sunday on the bucolic grounds of **Cline Cellars** in Sonoma. The day started with a leisurely preview of silent and live auction lots in the luxuriously appointed Toga Lounge, followed at 1pm by the dropping of the first gavel by auctioneer **Fritz Hatton** in the **Wine Spectator** Auction Tent. The bidding was fast and furious throughout the afternoon, helped in part by the decision this year to reduce the number of overall lots in favor of fewer and more exciting packages. Gods and goddesses alike strutted their stuff across the stage, delighting the crowd with Greco-Roman inspired decadence in an effort to gain top bid for their lot. The raucous crowd - egged on by vintner and grower hosts at each table - was whipped into a paddle-waving frenzy. The high bid of the day went to Benziger Family Winery who took to the stage en masse and in togas to sing a high-spirited, if somewhat off key rendition of "Shout" while raising \$51,000 for a 102 person toga party to be held next summer at the Benziger's Imagery Estate Winery. Other lots drawing top bids included The Sangiacomo Family's Chairman's Lot, which included a trip for two to Portofino and Milan, Italy, a lunch for 20 in their vineyards and a selection of Sangiacomo Vineyard Designated wines; A Roman Holiday, featuring a

2-day Sonoma experience, vertical of Cherry Block Cabernet Sauvignon, 6 day adventure trip to Tuscany & Umbria from **Sebastiani Vineyards & Winery**; a Hobbs-Knobbing with the Winemaker Soiree, offering an instant wine cellar, plus VIP winery visit and twilight dinner for six from **Paul Hobbs Winery**; A Golden Anniversary Wine, Dine, Music and Idaho Adventure package, including winemaker/celebrity chef dinner for 10, season tickets to winery concert series and three-day fly fishing trip to Idaho from **Rodney Strong Vineyards**; and a Star Treatment Mediterranean Cruise, including 11 nights for two aboard the new Solstice Class Celebrity Equinox, from **Celebrity Cruises**. As it has in years past, **Fund-a-Need** drew enthusiastic bidding even though there was nothing to win, other than the opportunity to help one of Sonoma's most vital non-profits, the Sonoma Community Center, so that this treasured Sonoma landmark can continue its mission to support the cultural, educational and recreational enrichment of Sonoma Valley.

"This is *the* event that we both look forward to attending all year," exclaimed perennial bidder **Rob Irwin** of Tulsa, OK, who attended with his wife, Jeannine. "We love this auction and the whole weekend, and we keep adding more friends from Tulsa to our table!" Rob and Jeannine have bid on the head table lot three consecutive years.

In all – between the **live auction**, silent auction (larger total than last year) and online e- auction that went live to bidders from around the world beginning August 1, the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Sonoma Valley Wine Auction raised well over \$400,000 for local Sonoma county charities.

### **About 2009 Sonoma Wine Country Weekend Sponsors and Beneficiaries**

A partnership between Sonoma Valley Vintners & Growers and Sonoma County Vintners, Sonoma Wine Country Weekend is the area's **largest wine and food fundraiser, having donated more than a combined \$8 million to local charities** that support students, children, farm workers and people in need.

The 2009 Sonoma Wine Country Weekend is presented by **Visa Signature**, whose cardholders will receive exclusive perks and savings throughout the event. From benefits that save time to benefits that help to safeguard purchases, Visa Signature helps cardholders get the most out of life. In addition to a choice of numerous airline, hotel and other premium reward partners, cardholders enjoy access to around-the-clock complimentary concierge services; epicurean events and reservations at the hottest restaurants; premium merchant offers; and access to exclusive events such as the Olympics, Super Bowl and the Tony Awards, as well as preferred access and seating at local sporting events, concerts and movie screenings. For more information about Visa Signature, visit [www.visa.com/signature](http://www.visa.com/signature).

Other partners include Executive Sponsors: **Trilogy Glass & Packaging** and **MacMurray Ranch**; Major Sponsors: American AgCredit, Sonoma County Winegrape Commission, Southern Wine & Spirits, and Buick; Winery Sponsors: **Cline Cellars**, Jacuzzi Family Vineyards, Rodney Strong Vineyards, and Gloria Ferrer Caves and Vineyards; Supporting Sponsors: Caliber WinePak, Stölzle USA, and Viking Range

Corporation; Media Sponsors: Wine Spectator, Gourmet Magazine and San Francisco Magazine. For a complete list of beneficiaries and sponsors of the 2009 Sonoma Wine Country Weekend, please visit [www.SonomaWineCountryWeekend.com](http://www.SonomaWineCountryWeekend.com).

### **About Sonoma Valley Vintners & Growers Alliance and Foundation**

The Sonoma Valley Vintners & Growers Alliance (SVVGA) is a non-profit trade organization serving over 500 vintners, growers and associates who share a mission to promote awareness of Sonoma Valley's grapes, wine, and history as the birthplace of the California wine industry. The Sonoma Valley Vintners and Growers Foundation (SVVGF) is a non-profit 501c.3 organization that has raised over \$6,000,000 for local Sonoma Valley charities through the Sonoma Valley Harvest Wine Auction. For more information on the SVVGA and SVVGF, please call 707-935-0803 or visit [www.SonomaValleyWine.com](http://www.SonomaValleyWine.com).

### **About Sonoma County Vintners**

Sonoma County Vintners (SCV) is the leading voice of Sonoma County wine, dedicated to raising awareness of Sonoma County as one of the world's premier wine regions, noted for its heritage of artisan winemaking, distinct growing regions, and extraordinary quality. Founded in 1944, SCV represents more than 175 wineries of all sizes throughout the county. [www.SonomaWine.com](http://www.SonomaWine.com).

### **Event Beneficiaries**

Throughout the history of the Sonoma Valley Harvest Wine Auction and the Showcase: Taste of Sonoma, over \$8 million has been raised to support local Sonoma charities. Beneficiaries for the 2009 event are local charities that benefit students, children, farm workers and people in need. Past recipients of event proceeds include the Redwood Empire Food Bank, Santa Rosa Junior College Foundation, Friends in Sonoma Helping (FISH), Hanna Boys Center, Operation Youth of Sonoma County, Sonoma Community Center, Sonoma Jazz Plus, Sonoma Overnight Support/Sonoma Brown Baggers, Sonoma Valley Community Health Center, Sonoma Valley Education Foundation, Sonoma Valley Hospital Foundation, Sonoma Valley Mentoring Alliance, Willmar Center for Bereaved Children, Boys & Girls Clubs of Sonoma, and Vineyard Worker Services. For more information, visit [www.SonomaWineCountryWeekend.com](http://www.SonomaWineCountryWeekend.com).

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