



## **SONOMA WINE COUNTRY WEEKEND GROSSES OVER \$1.3 MILLION**

### **Top Chefs, World Class Wines, Record Attendance and Record Bidding Highlight 3rd Annual Sonoma Wine Country Weekend Presented by Visa Signature®**

#### **First Ever Sell-Out for Taste of Sonoma at MacMurray Ranch®**

**Sonoma, Ca (September 5, 2010)** The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual [Sonoma Wine Country Weekend](#), presented by Visa Signature®, one of the country's most prestigious wine and food events and Sonoma County's largest vintner and chef-hosted fundraiser of the year, came to a close Sunday evening after raising \$1.3 million. The annual three day pre-harvest celebration – comprised of [Taste of Sonoma at MacMurray Ranch](#), the [Sonoma Valley Harvest Wine Auction](#) presented by Trilogy Glass & Packaging at Cline Cellars and a series of vintner lunches and dinners – enjoyed spectacular weather and record attendance while showcasing the regional bounty and world-class talents of more than 200 of Sonoma County's top wineries and chefs. To date, the combined events have donated more than \$10 million to local charities serving students, children, farm workers and people in need. The final donation tally for this year's event will be announced at the official check presentation ceremony slated for later this fall.

Sonoma Valley's venerable St. Francis Winery & Vineyards presided as Honorary Chairs of the 2010 Sonoma Wine Country Weekend, and hosted Saturday night's exclusive Chairman's Dinner.

#### **2010 Sonoma Valley Harvest Wine Auction**

**Endless Wine, Endless Food and Endless Fun** marked Sunday's 18th Annual Sonoma Valley Harvest Wine Auction, which saw wine enthusiasts from all over the country take to the grounds of Cline Cellars for the "Endless Sonoma"-themed live auction. Auctioneer Fritz Hatton kept the proceedings lively and the bidding spirited under the Wine Spectator tent, where the California beach party theme encouraged a dizzying display of tropical print shirts, loud board shorts, beach balls and more than \$500,000 in bids.

Event sponsor **Trilogy Glass & Packaging** scored the highest bid in auction history with their **\$58,000 winning bid** for the Magnum Force lot – a collection of 58 magnums from top vintners throughout Sonoma County. Sonoma Valley Vintners & Growers Executive Director **Maureen Lamb Cottingham** quickly took to the stage to tell auctioneer Fritz Hatton to double the lot, allowing **Bob and Chandra Friese**, who had been competing for the winning bid, to match Trilogy's bid, bringing the lot total to **\$116,000 – the highest single lot bid in the auction's history.**

“This is why we’re part of this great event,” said Trilogy’s Rick Miron. “It gives us an opportunity to partner with our winery customers in giving back to our local community.”

The Friese’s, who divide their time between homes in Sonoma and San Francisco concurred, with Bob Friese saying “We believe that when you are part of a community, you have an obligation to give back. We also believe that the winery workers and their families need a lot of help right now, and,” he added with a smile, “I don’t mind missing lunch for the next five years to do my part.”

Other top auction lots included:

- Fund-a-Wave of Philanthropy benefitting Sonoma’s La Luz Center, \$94,250
- Beach Blanket Benziger, \$51,500
- A Swinging Party with the Sangiacomo Family, \$20,000

“This is *the* big event of the year for people to come out and support our local community,” said Cottingham. “We could not be happier with the generosity and cooperative spirit that has been on display this entire weekend.”

**Beach Party Themed Skits:** Once again, the Benziger “boys” brought down the house at Sunday’s auction with their gut-splitting rendition, performed in full-on bikini and Daisy Dukes drag, of Katy Perry’s summer anthem “California Gurls”. Not to be outdone, the women of Magnum Force performed a synchronized dance-off to the iconic surf tune “Wipeout”.

**All Star & Celebrity Chefs:** This year’s Sonoma Wine Country Weekend was a culinary tour de force. Acclaimed chef, educator and James Beard Award winning author **John Ash** made his inaugural debut as Culinary Chair and was joined by world renowned chef, restaurateur and “Top Chef Masters” winner **Hubert Keller**. More than 60 of Sonoma’s top chefs put on an incredible display of regionally inspired gourmet bites at Saturday’s Taste of Sonoma at MacMurray Ranch, while on Sunday, Ash and his team of all-stars including **Justin Wangler** (Kendall-Jackson Wine Estates), **John Toulze** (the girl & the fig) **Chris Jones** (ESTATE) , **Josh Silvers** (Syrah Bistro), **Jeff Mall** (Zin Restaurant & Wine Bar), **Janine Falvo** (Carneros Bistro & Wine Bar at the Lodge at Sonoma), **Justin Everett** (El Dorado Kitchen), **Carlo Cavallo** (Sonoma Meritage Restaurant & Oyster Bar), **Bruce Riezenman** (Park Avenue Catering), **Mark Stark** (Willi’s Wine Bar, Monti’s Rotisserie & Bar and Stark’s Steakhouse) and **John Stewart** with soon-to-be Iron Chef contestant **Duskie Estes**(Zazu and bovolò), presented an exquisite six course wine pairing menu at the Sonoma Valley Harvest Wine Auction.

### **Taste of Sonoma at MacMurray Ranch**

For the first time in its 31 year history, **Saturday’s Taste of Sonoma at MacMurray Ranch sold out in advance**. The capacity crowd of 2,500 flocked to the historic property for an unparalleled wine country

experience that included world class wines and culinary offerings from 200 of Sonoma County's top vintners and chefs as well as grape picking and pressing demonstrations, virtual appellation tours, farm and food marketplace, VIP lounges, reserve tastings and the popular Steel Chef competition,

"The success of this event is a great example of what can happen when our Sonoma County community of vintners, growers, chefs and artisan food producers come together in support of a shared goal," enthused Sonoma County Vintners Executive Director **Honore Comfort**.

**Steel Chef Competition: For the first time, the Steel Chef competition ended in a tie, with Janine Falvo of Carneros Bistro & Wine Bar and Jack Mitchell of Jack & Tony's** both wowing the judges – including surprise judge **Hubert Keller** of Fleur de Lys and Burger Bar in San Francisco - with their inspired take on the competition's first all vegetarian round. A standing room-only crowd gathered to watch the heated competition as the final two chefs were presented with a mystery mix of vegetables and Sonoma-raised eggs. Mitchell prepared potato pancakes with poached eggs, while Falvo got inventive, returning her egg creation to the shell for presentation. Immediately after the event, both chefs headed straight to the kitchens of their respective restaurants for expected full houses.

"There's an extra 2,000 people in the county this weekend," Mitchell told the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, "and this is why they are here."

#### **About 2010 Sonoma Wine Country Weekend Sponsors and Beneficiaries**

A partnership between Sonoma Valley Vintners & Growers Foundation and Sonoma County Vintners, Sonoma Wine Country Weekend is the area's largest wine and food fundraiser, having jointly donated more than \$10 million to local charities that support students, children, farm workers and people in need. The 2010 Sonoma Wine Country Weekend is presented by **Visa Signature®**; Visa Signature cardholders will receive exclusive benefits throughout the event. In addition to Visa Signature, the 2010 Sonoma Wine Country Weekend is being made possible by the following sponsors: **Caliber WinePak, MacMurray Ranch®, Trilogy Glass & Packaging, Wine Spectator, Wall Street Journal, San Francisco Magazine, Cline Cellars and Jacuzzi Family Vineyards**. For a complete list of beneficiaries and sponsors of the 2010 Sonoma Wine Country Weekend, please visit [www.SonomaWineCountryWeekend.com](http://www.SonomaWineCountryWeekend.com).

#### **About Visa Signature**

The 2010 Sonoma Wine Country Weekend is presented by Visa Signature®. Visa Signature cardholders will receive exclusive savings and perks throughout the event. From benefits that save time to benefits that help safeguard purchases, Visa Signature helps cardholders get the most out of life. Visa Signature offers cardholders a range of benefits and perks, in addition to a number of rewards programs that may be offered by Visa Signature partners, such as airline, hotel and cash back programs. Visa Signature cardholders have exclusive access to complimentary concierge services, the Visa Signature Luxury Hotel Collection, and complimentary wine tastings at more than 60 Sonoma County wineries year-round. Plus, cardholders enjoy

premium merchant offers, as well as preferred access and seating at epicurean events, premier concerts, Broadway shows, and sporting events. For more information about Visa Signature, visit [www.visa.com/signature](http://www.visa.com/signature).

### **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 \$8,000,000 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).

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