

## TASTE OF VAIL REPORTS RECORD PROCEEDS FROM WINE AUCTIONS

by Rich Mauro

From the beginning, the Taste of Vail has been a fundraising vehicle for Vail Valley charities. It was even more so this year. Sure, there were the over 30 world-class restaurants (several of which sport *Wine Spectator* awards) serving delectable food at the Après Ski tasting, Mountain Top Picnic, Grand Tasting, and three chef's showcase dinners.

And, of course, those events, along with the wine seminars, featured a wide variety of wines from 60 wineries, representing California, Oregon, Washington, Canada, France, Italy, Portugal, Australia and New Zealand.

On the strength of these events and the chance to catch some spring skiing in one of the world's top resorts, the Taste of Vail has become widely regarded as one of the best wine and food events in the country. And, based on what I have been told over the years, it is one of the most sought after among wine producers.

But the Taste of Vail's organizers are most proud of the festival's charity fundraising.

Since its inception 15 years ago, the Taste of Vail has contributed more than \$300,000 to area charities. Donations have been made to schools, cultural institutions, hospitals, housing agencies, and health care services.

This year the festival, held April 5 through 8, really ratcheted up the fundraising. Adding a live auction element to the traditional silent auction, the festival grossed more than \$43,000 from its four live auctions alone. That's a 62

**Taste of Vail's Grand Tasting, Auction & Dance is a wine and culinary extravaganza in the Grand Ballroom of the Vail Marriott Mountain Resort & Spa. (Photo courtesy Taste of Vail/Stovall Stills Photography)**



**Auctioneer Tom DiNardo works the crowd at Taste of Vail's Grand Tasting, Auction & Dance on his way to grossing more than \$43,000 for Vail Valley Charities. (Photo courtesy Taste of Vail/Stovall Stills Photography)**

percent increase over last year, and nearly 50 percent more than the previous high set in 2004.

The proceeds will be evenly distributed among the newly created Taste of Vail Educational Scholarship, a joint effort with ProStart (a program that encourages high school students to consider a career in the restaurant industry) and Eagle County; the Vail Valley Youth Foundation's soccer program; and other as yet undetermined local charitable programs that otherwise would not be able to continue without additional funding.

Organizers said the big difference this year was their decision to bring in a professional auctioneer, Tom DiNardo of the nationally recognized DiNardo & Lord Auctioneers, based in Lynden, Washington.

DiNardo conducted live auctions at the festival's three Chefs Showcase Dinners, as well as at the Grand Tasting. Ticket-holders bid on a wide selection of wines, culinary and travel auction items donated by various wineries and sponsors.

The top five winning bids for prizes at the Grand Tasting included:

- \$2,600 — Four VIP passes to the 2007 Hospice du Rhône wine festival in May, donated by Garretson Wine Company of Paso Robles.
- \$2,200 — 6-liter etched bottles of both 2002 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and 2003 Pinot Noir, donated by Amici Cellars, of Napa Valley.
- \$2,200 — A signed magnum bottle of 2002 Chardonnay, along with a winery tour, tasting and lunch for four people, donated by Chalk Hill Estate, in Sonoma County.
- \$2,000 — A 6-liter etched bottle of 2000 Cabernet Sauvignon, a winery tour, tasting and lunch for four people, donat-

ed by Napa Valley's Far Niente Winery.

- \$1,800 — A 5-liter etched bottle of 1999 Pinot Noir Barrel Select, a winery tour, tasting and two nights accommodations, donated by Van Duzer Vineyards, in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

DiNardo, who notes that out of tens of thousands of auctioneers in the country, only about 100 specialize in fundraising for nonprofits and only about ten specialize in wine-related fundraising, believes that the Taste of Vail ultimately can raise at least two-thirds of its income from live auctions. That's good news for Vail Valley charities.

Of course, there was also a lot of great wine at the festival. I can't conclude without mentioning a few that impressed me.

Roussane had an impact with 2004 vintage samples from Garretson and Terre Rouge (of Sierra Foothills).

Cabernet Franc proved it could be as good as its Cabernet sibling with 2003 vintage pours from Pride Mountain and Ehlers Estate of Napa Valley.

Pinot Noir showed its stuff from four different wine regions, none of which was Santa Barbara: 2002 Calera Jensen Vineyard (Mt. Harlan), 2002 Talisman Ted's Vineyard (Russian River Valley), 2003 Amici (Mendocino), and 2002 Chehalem Reserve (Oregon).

Finally, two producers better known for their Pinot Noir made an impression with Syrah — 2002 Domaine Serene Riverblock Del Rio Vineyard (Oregon) and 2003 Melville Estate (Santa Barbara).

**"Enchanted Journey" by artist Anton Arkhipov — the official artwork of the 16th annual Taste of Vail — "uses symbolism as part of a fantasy," says Kevin Frest of Frest & Royce Fine Art, which represents the artist.**

