

# The Press DEMOCRAT

## Leno works wonders

*'Tonight Show' host, 'Desperate Housewives' star push bidding to record \$10 million*

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By PEG MELNIK --- THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Jay Leno is one tough auctioneer.

Saturday's Auction Napa Valley raised more than \$10 million, a record for the charity auction that marked its 25th year. "The Tonight Show" host cajoled the wealthiest bidders amid a crowd of more than 1,000 to raise their paddles without restraint.

**Leno, with a souffle of gray hair and his trademark jaw, routinely teased more out of bidders, at one point coaxing Teri Hatcher of "Desperate Housewives" fame on stage.**

**Hatcher offered someone a chance at a walk-on role on the ABC show, a studio tour for six and 17 bottles of Frank Family Vineyards wine. The bid for a moment of TV-star status was \$300,000.**

And that was only the beginning.

Leno put his arm around wine legend Robert Mondavi and auctioned off Mondavi's handcrafted cork jacket, which went for \$95,000.

Later in the evening, the bids continued to spiral.

The lot celebrating Mondavi and his brother, Peter, offering 60 bottles from a barrel created by the two families, along with a barrel tasting, brought in \$401,000. Finally, a record was set for a single lot in the wine auction when four rare and coveted three-litre bottles from Colgin Cellars and a dinner for eight at the winery in St. Helena went for \$650,000.

Leno opened the auction beneath a vast white tent at the Meadowood Resort in St. Helena with a stand-up covering nearly every topic but wine, from crime to life in Los Angeles to politics. The comic kicked off his remarks by saying, "This is a performer's dream, rich people who have been drinking."

The live auction capped off a week of events that included barrel and silent auctions, intimate dinner parties and hospitality events.

Auction Napa Valley benefits local health, children and housing organizations, including Health Clinic Ole, the Boys and Girls Club from American Canyon to Calistoga and Napa Valley Community Housing.

More than 3,000 people went to the Friday Festival at Trinchero Family Estates in St. Helena to listen to live jazz, nosh on foie gras and ceviche, and bid on barrel and silent auctions.

Bidders at the festival participated in a high-tech silent auction called the E-Auction, sending in bids from 14 virtual kiosks.

Frank Pilotte of Palm Beach, Fla., set his bid in motion by entering the Saintsbury lot. He joked, "We'll see if the system crashes at the end of the day."

The festival also served as a backdrop for vintners promoting their live auction lots. Robert and Peter Mondavi sat on a platform for nearly two hours while photographers captured the moment of the two vintners who have come together after a chilly, and sometimes stormy, 40 years.

Tim Mondavi, Robert's son, said "Ancora una volta," Italian for "Once again, once more."

Asked why cooperating on creation of the wine barrel offered in the lot came at this time, Robert Mondavi, 91, said "time."

Peter Mondavi, 90, said, "I've always been family-oriented and was sorry when we made the split."

The two vintners separated in 1965, and Robert eventually founded Robert Mondavi Winery, took it public and saw his role disappear in a corporate takeover. "When he went public, it was the kiss of death," Peter said.

**Also on Friday, Teri Hatcher posed in front of an enlarged photograph of the cast of "Desperate Housewives" and talked about wine.**

**"I don't pretend to be a connoisseur," Hatcher said. "You can know everything about wine on an intellectual level, but at the end of the day, it's just like a painting. You either like it or you don't. You just have to trust your palate."**

The infusion of entertainers like Hatcher at this year's auction was part of a marketing strategy to raise the profile of Napa Valley and its premier money-raising event. However, auction organizers would not disclose how much they paid for performers like Leno and Grammy award-winning jazz artist Diana Krall, who performed at Joseph Phelps Winery on Friday night.

Playing the same 10-foot-long Steinway Concert Grand Piano that she played at the Sonoma Jazz Festival last week, Krall sang for about an hour, concluding with a raspy rendition of "Sunny Side of the Street."

Bill Phelps, vice chairman of the board, wouldn't disclose Krall's fee, but said it was greatly reduced to benefit the auction.

Last year, the Napa auction raised \$5.2 million, \$1 million less than the year before. Napa's event, long the leader in charitable wine auctions worldwide, was surpassed in February by Florida's Naples Winter Wine Festival, which raised a record \$11 million.

The Napa auction still trumps Sonoma County wine auctions, with Chalk Hill's Imagine 2004 the most successful, raising \$1 million-plus.

