

Sonoma Sunday

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WILD ABOUT WINE



Toni McWilliams, director of Jackson Family Enterprises, puts in a bid for Jess Jackson as she talks to him on the phone Saturday during the Sonoma Paradiso wine auction. Jackson, who was at home following his horse Curlin's Gold Cup race at Belmont in New York, had the winning bid of \$160,000 for a Tesla electric car. Curlin won the \$750,000 race.

Jackson, Disney help auction bring in \$921,000

By PEG MELNIK
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

The highest bid at Saturday's Sonoma Paradiso auction came via cell phone. Vintner Jess Jackson called from his Alexander Valley home to buy the eco-friendly Tesla Roadster electric sports car for \$160,000.

Jackson and his wife, Barbara Banke, gave a video welcome to bidders because he was following the Gold Cup race of their horse Curlin at home while she was on the scene at Belmont in New York.

Organizers raised about \$921,000 for several Sonoma County charities, down from last year's take of \$2 million.

More than 400 people paid \$750 each to sip and bid under the white tent at Healdsburg's Stonestreet Winery, taking in a sweeping view of the Alexander Mountain.

In a phone interview before arriving at the auction, Jackson said, "I bought the car because I wanted Barbara to have it. We're trying to be conservative and conserve fuel."

Drawing almost as much excitement as the Tesla was the Disneyland lot, a glimpse into the inner workings of Disney's theme parks. The lot, which included a stay in the late Walt Disney's dream suite overlooking New Orleans Square inside the theme park, went for \$75,000.

"If you want to go in the middle of the night in your bathrobe, you can get a picture of yourself in front of Sleeping Beauty's castle," joked John Lasseter, chief creative officer of Pixar and Walt Disney Animation Studios. Lasseter, who lives in the Sonoma Valley with his family, introduced the lot.

Debbie Chambers of Naples, Fla., said she bought the lot because her kids are 11, 9 and 7. "My kids love everything Pixar, and when you throw in Disney, you're done," she said.

Lasseter was a bidder as well as a lot presenter. He and his wife, Nan-

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AUCTION: Event second in state only to Auction Napa Valley

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cy, bought the "Lab and Cab" lot for \$15,000. "We moved into a new house and we needed a ranch dog," he said. The lot included one chocolate Labrador retriever puppy and one six-liter bottle of the coveted Silver Oak 2004 Alexander Cabernet.

Before the auction, Jon Iverson of Healdsburg said, "I'm sure I have a spending limit, even the government has a spending limit, but you never know what's going to happen in events like this. If something strikes you, it's an emotional issue and it's a good cause."

Beneficiaries of Sonoma Paradiso include the Scholarship Fund of Sonoma Academy, the California Parenting Institute and the Redwood Empire Food Bank.

After the auction, entertainer David Foster, formerly a member of the group Chicago, performed some of his songs, while guests dined on filet mignon and lobster.

Last year, Francis Ford Coppola, the Academy Award-winning director, set the stage for Sonoma Paradiso at his Geyersville winery Rosso & Bianco, formerly known as Chateau Souverain.

For the first three years of the auction, it was called Imag-



Auctioneer Fritz Hatton calls for bidders for a wine lot Saturday during the Sonoma Paradiso wine auction at Stonestreet Winery in the Alexander Valley. About 400 people attended the event.

ine and was held at the Chalk Hill Estates Winery owned by high-powered trial attorney Fred Furth and his then-wife, Peggy Furth.

They continue to be sponsors, along with Jackson and Banke and others, of what is now Sonoma Paradiso, with a goal of being the most successful Sonoma County wine charity auction for years to come.

Paradiso may face some

competition from the Sonoma Wine Country Weekend, which features a number of fund-raising events, including the Sonoma Valley Harvest Auction, and grossed more than \$1.5 million during its inaugural three-day festival over Labor Day weekend.

Paradiso, which is solely an auction, is second in California only to Auction Napa Valley, which raised \$10.3 million

in June.

The Napa auction recently lost its standing as the leader in charitable auctions worldwide, surpassed by Florida's Naples Winter Wine Festival, which raised \$14 million at its live auction in January.

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"We moved into a new house and we needed a ranch dog."

JOHN LASSETER, Pixar and Disney exec who bid \$15,000 for the "Lab and Cab" lot — a puppy and a 6-liter bottle of Silver Oak cabernet