ST. HELENA STAR

Napa Valley's fifth annual Wineapawlooza raises $1.4 million to help save, rescue animals

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During Saturday's Wineapawlooza event, held at Oakville's Gamble Family Vineyards, auctioneer Fritz Hatton addressed the crowd during the Fund-A- Need auction lot, raising money for disaster preparedness, rescue and emergency funding.

The two-day WineaPAWlooza, a benefit for St. Helena's Jameson Animal Rescue Ranch, raised $1.4 million on Friday and Saturday to help save and shelter animals.

For the first time, the event was split into two days, with Friday's main auction event held at Nine Suns. On Saturday, the evening's events started with the tasting of red wines from 48 local wineries and producers, along with a large amount of vegan food served as "finger food" at the Gamble Family Vineyards property in Oakville.

Of the $1.4 million, $300,000 was raised for disaster relief for Jameson Animal Rescue Ranch (JARR), which runs nine programs in 10 counties. On Tuesday, JARR co-founder Monica Stevens was on the phone, trying to get 30 dog cages moved from Lower Lake to the emergency shelter at Middletown High School, where many of those evacuated from the Lake County wildfires were staying.

Saturday night, Tom Gamble was on stage with David and Monica Stevens, JARR co-founders. Gamble and his wife Colette have been hosts of Wineapawlooza since it began five years ago. Tom Gamble spoke hesitantly because he said he "was getting choked up because I see smoke over there," referring to the state's numerous wildfires, including those burning in Lake County, Redding, Berryessa Highlands and in Ukiah.

"October 8th will live in infamy," he said, referring to the beginning of last year's Atlas, Tubbs and Nuns wildfires that burned 145,000 acres, killed 31 people and destroyed 7,759 buildings and properties through Napa, Sonoma and Solano counties.

"Tonight, the Fund-A-Need is about disaster preparedness, to save pets and animals," Gamble said.

then told a story from 12 years ago, when he and others were on horses in the middle of 10,000 acres, trying to save a herd of cattle from a wildfire. "We couldn't outrun the flames, so we had to turn them into the flames. The horses didn't want to do this, the cattle didn't want to do this," he said. "But we did it, we saved the cattle. We didn't know where the rest of the cattle were, but later we found out that CalFire had saved them."

After Gamble's story, Monica called a huge group of people to the stage – those who worked with Jameson to save animals during last October's wildfires.

Auctioneer Fritz Hatton asked the crowd for donations to the Fund-A-Need lot. They started slowly at the $10,000 level and then when Hatton asked for $1,000 donations, 14 people raised their programs. "Who else at $1,000?" he asked. The crowd applauded as Hatton collected donations at the $500, $250 and $100 level. "Who can't give $100?" he asked. "Last call."

The local rock 'n' roll band, Wristrocket, founded by vintner Jeff Smith and made up of people in the wine industry, including David Stevens, played a dozen songs for 90 minutes – much to the crowd's delight. And three people paid between $2,500 and $3,500 each for the possibility of stardom as they joined the band on stage, ringing cowbells in Wild Cherry's "Play That Funky Music."

The 19 auction lots and raffle raised $1.1 million both nights.

But, it was Saturday's "famous" pet parade, featuring 10 adoptable and adorable dogs that stole this reporter's heart.

Sportscaster Bonnie-Jill Laflin announced the entrants in the pet parade and wrote on Twitter that she had a "wonderful time" being an MC. "Love being an ambassador for this phenomenal rescue." Those leading the pets across the stage were Tom Archambault, Deassa Binstock, Brenda Burke, Kelly Carter, Andrea Jordan, Health Leake, Bergen Verdu, Amanda Vollstedt and Courtney Wilson.