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WINE AUCTION PREMIERE

Sonoma Paradiso
joins charity circuit

Photos by SCOTT MANCHESTER / The Press Democrat

ANIMATED PRESENTER: Pixar and Disney executive John Lasseter cheers about his auction lot at the Sonoma Paradiso auction Saturday at Rosso & Bianco Winery in Geyserville. "What's exciting about this level of an auction is that it has brought people from all over the country to Sonoma," he said.

Coppola, Lasseter, vintners coax \$2 million in bids in Geyserville

By PEG MELNIK

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Francis Ford Coppola, the Academy Award-winning director, set the stage for the premiere of Sonoma Paradiso, the wine auction formerly known as Imagine that raised \$2 million Saturday.

Coppola supplied a new venue — his Alexander Valley winery Rosso & Bianco, formerly known as Chateau Souverain, in Geyserville.

More than 400 people came to sip and bid under the white tent at the charity auction, now in its fourth year. While early results indicate the contributions fell short of last year's take of \$2.5 million, the amount is still second in California only to that of Auction Napa Valley, which raised \$7.48 million in June.

Coppola, who has his own winery in the Napa Valley, said he's a "proud newcomer" to Sonoma County. "I was in Buenos Aires 36 hours ago working on a film. Yes, I'm still a filmmaker. I'm very proud to be part of Sonoma County's winegrowing tradition. In the near future it will be the proud equal of Napa Valley."

While a single-prop airplane and a new Maserati drew the highest bids, the final impromptu lot was the most suspenseful.

Vintner Jess Jackson, introducing the lot, coaxed paddle-holders to help



organizers reach \$2 million when they were \$49,500 shy. He took the stage, along with Coppola and John Lasseter, a vintner who doubles as the chief creative officer of Disney and Pixar Animation Studios. Jackson said the lot featured a magnum signed by each and a dinner cooked by each.

Shirlene Elkins, who bought the lot with three others, is a trustee on the board of the Naples Winter Wine Festival, which is the biggest money-raising wine auction in the world.

She said that Jackson and his wife, Barbara Banke, have "always been very supportive of the Naples auction"

MOMENT WITH THE HOSTS:

Francis Ford Coppola, from left, and his wife, Eleanor, came in as the top bidders on John Lasseter's lot Saturday. More than 400 revelers joined the Coppolas under a white tent at their Alexander Valley winery for the charity auction.

PHOTO GALLERY

Images from Saturday's charity auction in Geyserville pressdemocrat.com

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