



For Immediate Release

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## **Sonoma Wine Country Weekend Launches First Annual Virtual Auction**

*Online Auction Goes Live in August*

*To Kick off Excitement and Build Momentum for Weekend*

August XX, 2008 – Santa Rosa, CA: The zany, iconic Sonoma Valley Harvest Auction is always an event to look forward to – but this year, bidders will have a chance to get a jump on the action. Beginning in August, anyone with access to the internet will have an opportunity to bid on select lots designed for this special online venue. As part of the 2008 Sonoma Wine Country Weekend, this first-ever online auction will offer approximately forty lots from Sonoma vintners and businesses to raise money for local charities.

For this year's inaugural online auction, Sonoma Wine Country Weekend teamed up with cMarket, an on-demand, online auction platform designed solely for organizations engaged in fundraising for nonprofit causes, to create a virtual auction experience to complement the weekend's festivities. Starting on August 1<sup>st</sup> and continuing throughout the month, visitors to [www.WineCountryWeekend.cMarket.com](http://www.WineCountryWeekend.cMarket.com) can bid on select lots that will vary in value from \$100 - \$3,000. Sample lots include a special jeroboam (6L) bottle of 1991 Sebastiani Cabernet Sauvignon, a romantic weekend in the wine country, and terrior tasting from La Crema featuring four large-sized bottles from the family owned estate in the Russian River Valley. All money raised will benefit more than fifteen charities that support students, children, farm workers and people in need.

Over the past fifteen years, seven million dollars for local charities has been raised through the live auction. Last year's live auction distributed a record \$904,050, which was attributed to increased attendance, new events and larger venue. This year, Sonoma vintners hope the Sonoma Wine Country Weekend Online Auction will help raise even more money by creating a virtual venue in which a larger number of interested people can bid.

"In the sixteen-year history of the auction, we have always had more people want to donate and be involved," states Maureen Cottingham, Marketing and Events Director for Sonoma Valley Vintners and Growers Alliances. "Now with today's technology, we can reach a greater number of people – some who might not be able to attend the actual events – and get them excited and involved in this fun and charitable cause."

The festivities culminate at the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Sonoma Valley Harvest Wine Auction at Cline Cellars on Sunday, August 31<sup>st</sup> during Wine Country Weekend. Renowned for its wild themes and iconic skits, this year's sixties-themed live auction promises psychedelic silliness while raising important money for local charities. Highlights include The Lava Lamp Lounge where



people can sip wine and socialize next to the Volkswagen Bus-turned-refreshment stand. A live band will perform for the first time ever throughout the auction recreating throwback Rolling Stones tunes and other 60s favorites. Another premiere feature this year will be the Sommelier Stars from prominent restaurants throughout the U.S. who will sit at VIP tables and personally guide guests through a customized wine experience.

Live auction lots for the Sonoma Valley Harvest Wine Auction include, among others, a French culinary arts trip of Julia Child's favorite kitchens in Washington D.C. and Paris, a week for four in Florence at the Petroni family's elegant two bedroom apartment on Piazza dell'Olio with guided tours and special select wine, as well as a vineyard luncheon for twenty in Sangiacomo Vineyards with a jazz trio and selection of over twenty different wines made from the grapes grown in this esteemed vineyard.

Sonoma Wine Country Weekend is produced by the Sonoma County Vintners and the Sonoma Valley Vintners & Growers. Beneficiaries for the 2008 event are local charities that support students, children, farm workers and people in need. The 2008 Sonoma Wine Country Weekend is presented by Visa Signature, whose cardholders will receive exclusive benefits throughout the event. For more information about Sonoma Wine Country Weekend, visit [www.sonomawinecountryweekend.com](http://www.sonomawinecountryweekend.com) or call 800.939.7666

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#### **About Sonoma Wine Country Weekend**

Sonoma Wine Country Weekend is a partnership between Sonoma County Vintners and Sonoma Valley Vintners & Growers, producing the largest and most comprehensive wine country event in Sonoma County, [www.sonomawinecountryweekend.com](http://www.sonomawinecountryweekend.com).

- The Sonoma Valley Vintners & Growers Alliance (SVVGA) is a non-profit trade organization serving over 500 vintners, growers and associates who share a mission to promote awareness of Sonoma Valley's grapes, wine, terroir and history as the birthplace of the California wine industry. The Sonoma Valley Vintners and Growers Foundation (SVVGF) is a non-profit organization that has raised over \$8,000,000 for local Sonoma Valley charities through the Sonoma Valley Harvest Wine Auction. For more information on the SVVGA and SVVGF, please call 707-935-0803 or visit [www.sonomavalleywine.com](http://www.sonomavalleywine.com).
- Sonoma County Vintners is the leading voice of Sonoma County wine, dedicated to raising awareness of Sonoma County as one of the world's premier wine regions, noted for its heritage of artisan winemaking, distinct growing regions, and extraordinary quality. Founded in 1944, SCV represents more than 140 wineries of all sizes throughout the county. [www.sonomawine.com](http://www.sonomawine.com).

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