

Soul-Tied: Wine Industry Pros Rally Together to Help Restaurant Workers

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WINE COUNTRY COVID-RELIEF AUCTION RAISES \$20,000 IN FIRST WEEK, BENEFITTING RESTAURANT WORKERS NATION-WIDE

by Stacy Briscoe

"The wine world is, quite literally, soul-tied to the restaurant world. They have served us for so long, that now it is our community's time to serve them," said Jonah Beer, vice president of Frog's Leap. This was the sentiment that motivated Beer and long-time friend, Bryan Lipa, a former French Laundry sommelier who now runs wine sales company Scale Wine Group, to kick-start [Wine Country for Restaurants \(WCR\)](#), a weekly online wine auction held on [WineBid.com](#) built on donations from wineries and restaurant cellars around the globe.

The project came together rather quickly, according to Lipa and Beer, who said it only took them a couple of phone calls to wine industry colleagues to get the charity up and running within two weeks. "The immediate response was overwhelming," Lipa said. "Our goal was to have 25 items up for bid each week, but looking ahead, we were worried about the momentum going into weeks four and five."

He needn't have worried. Michelle Lipa, Bryan Lipa's wife and WCR's public relations manager told *The Somm Journal* that, as of this week, WCR has received 150 lots. "Some have been multiples—anywhere

from two bottles to an entire case of wine per lot," she said. That's enough donations to keep the charity running well into a sixth week.

How it works: The auction began on April 5. Every Sunday evening, a new set of 25 auction lots are placed on WineBid.com. Each auction goes live starting at 7:15 p.m. PST and ends at 7 p.m. the following Sunday. More information, including participating wineries, can be found at 86LostWages.org.

All money, minus a 9% seller's fee, is wired directly from WineBid.com to Restaurant Workers' Community Foundation (RWCF), an advocacy and action nonprofit created by and for restaurant workers, who have created a COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund. The non-profit gives half of that donation to restaurant workers directly; the other half is split fifty-fifty between zero percent loans to restaurants and donations to other non-profit organizations assisting restaurant workers.



According to Russ Mann, CEO of WineBid.com, the online auction house (which has been in business since 1996) has seen a significant increase in new bidders. "I think, maybe, because the wines are donated directly from the wineries, there's a bit more appeal there," Mann said. "There's been a bit more bidding action."

That increase tallied up to \$19,021.50 after the charity's first week. The top bid went to a magnum of Screaming Eagle 2015 The Flight, which sold for \$4,000.

In the weeks to come, bidders can look forward to more rarities, like a three-year vertical of Opus One (1991-1993) and a double magnum of Signorello 2006 Padron. And it's not just local wineries donating to the cause. Donations from wine country's throughout the U.S. as well as abroad are starting to chip in too. For example, Lipa informed, WineBid.com "just received a Magnum of 2016 Meursault "Clos de la Baronne" Domaine des Comtes Lafon."

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