

## TASTE OF SONOMA

### Wine weekend champions flavors of county

33rd annual food and wine celebration sold out 5 days early, while scalpers offered late tickets at rich prices

By MARTIN ESPINOZA

#### THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Organizers of the immensely popular Taste of Sonoma wine and food extravaganza on Saturday knew they had another hit on their hands when they saw their \$150 tickets selling on Craigslist for \$400.

All of the more than 2,500 tickets to the event, held amid the rolling vineyards and Redwood groves at MacMurray Ranch in the Russian River Valley near Healdsburg, were sold out last Monday.

Taste of Sonoma, now in its 33rd year, is part of Sonoma County Wine Country Weekend, a massive fundraising event that includes today's Sonoma Valley Harvest Wine Auction. With 206 wineries and 70 restaurants participating, Taste of Sonoma has become the biggest one-day, one-stop showcase of all things wine- and food-related in Sonoma County.

"It's literally the most incredible snapshot of Sonoma County," said Maureen Cotting

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**Bart Hansen, winemaker and owner of Dane Cellars, pours a 2008 Sonoma Valley zin for Kari Crowley of San Jose at the Taste of Sonoma at MacMurray Ranch in Healdsburg on Saturday.**

CRISTA JEREMIASON / The Press Democrat

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#### TASTE: Winemakers demonstrate their craft

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ham, who with Honore Comfort is co-executive director of Wine Country Weekend.

Under an impressive complex of white tents, visitors tasted the area's best wines, sampled exotic appetizers and watched winemaking demonstrations or nailbiting cooking competitions between area chefs. Kari Crowley of San Jose

sampled a glass of zinfandel from Dane Cellars of Sonoma Valley after prepping her palate with Veracruz-style spicy fish tacos made by Christopher Greenwald, the chef and owner of Bay Laurel Culinary, a boutique catering company based in Petaluma.

"It's an awesome complement to the spicy tacos," Crowley said of the zinfandel.

Crowley, who was attending the event for the first time, said she was impressed by how well it was organized.

"It's a nice opportunity to explore new wines and spend time with our friends," she said.

A 15-minute cooking competition offered observers a behind-the-scenes look at local culinary expertise and creativity. In the first round of the Sonoma Steel Chef Competition, Steve Rose, chef/owner of the Vineyards Inn Spanish Bar & Grill in Kenwood, faced off against Carlo Cavallo, chef/owner of Meritage Martini Oyster Bay & Grill in Sonoma.

The chefs were to concoct on the spot an appetizer out of a list of fresh, local ingredients that included bacon, heirloom tomatoes, cucumbers and goat cheese. As the chefs worked feverishly, the audience was treated to a sample of 2010 Chateau St. Jean Chardonnay.

"You're chopping up bacon. What is your plan?" asked KZST radio host Brent Farris, who cohosted the cooking competition with Clark Wolf, a nationally recognized culinary consultant.

"I haven't a clue," said Rose.

During the competition, the hosts offered endless culinary tips that provided but a small hint of the vast landscape of fine eating in Sonoma County.

"If you have an oaky chardonnay, white cheddar is fantastic with it," Wolf said.

At the crushpad, observers were given a demonstration of the winemaking process. The session featured Jim Young of Robert Young Estate Winery in Alexander Valley and Dan Fitzgerald, winemaker at Brack Mountain Wine Company.

Debbie Magliulo, a San Francisco native who has lived in Italy almost 30 years, was among those tasting the juice of merlot grapes that had been fermenting since the morning.

"It's delicious," she said, noting that California's wine has achieved mainstream popularity in Italy.

"They actually sell California wines in supermarkets," she said.

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**Steve Rose, left, of Vineyards Inn Spanish Bar and Grill participates Saturday in the Steel Chef Competition while Clark Wolf describes his dish at the Taste of Sonoma at MacMurray Ranch in Healdsburg.**

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