

Front Page / Home

News

Sports

Business

Features

Focus On...

Local Commentary

Newsmaker

ESCAPE / Entertainment

Obituaries

Your Schools

S.C.V. History

Contact Us

Subscription Services

Classifieds

Valley Homes

See Display Ads

SCV Publications

City / Community

Weather Forecast

Freeway Conditions

Earthquake Activity

Calif. Power Outlook

Sex Offender Locator

November Voter Guide

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Loose Goose Wines, Dines 4,000

**By Jessica Marks
Signal Staff Writer**

Monday October 9, 2006

The second annual Loose Goose Wine Festival wrapped up five days worth of celebratory activities Sunday, when visitors gathered at Bridgeport Park for fun, exotic wines and to raise money for charity.

This year, wine pairing dinners were Wednesday night, followed by a golf tournament Thursday, a gala Friday and weekend full of activity at the main festival Saturday night and Sunday afternoon.

Vendors came mostly from California, but some international vineyards were represented, coming as far away as Argentina, South Africa and New Zealand.

They sold wine and all of the luxury items associated with it - including lush faux fur blankets, fancy clothes made by hand and imported cigars.

"It's very relaxing here," said Kenny Janeski, who balanced a glass of wine and a hand-crafted cigar.

An estimated 4,000 guests attended this year's activities, and more than 40 vineyards at the festival uncorked bottles of their very best wines, offering samples to anyone who had a ticket and wanted to try.

"My husband is the wine person, so we follow him around," said Danise Gembala of Santa Clarita. She added she was mostly interested in the food, which included sushi and chocolate treats.

It was also informative, as winery staff members were eager to explain how the wine was made or how it was different from other brands.

Rex Pickett, author of the novel "Sideways" - from which an Academy Award-winning film was based - spoke about the significance of wine, signed books and answered any questions.

"(The festival has been) beyond my expectations," he said. "People have been coming and having such a great time."

Indeed, they were, as sassy women wore paper tiaras on their head with the words "Wild Women on Wine," an homage to girls who like to get together and have fun, said Shanin Martin, vendor.

More than fun, the festival was able to raise nearly \$5,000 for the Henry Mayo Newhall Memorial Hospital's patient services as people bid at a silent auction on items donated by vendors.

Up for grabs were a free Mercedes Benz and Bentley car rentals and other high-ticket items, and some people became playfully competitive at the auction.

"There was a lot of hovering," hospital volunteer Kristin Hampton said.

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Francisca Rivas/Staff Photographer
Beverly McLoed of Northridge tries wine during Sunday's Loose Goose Wine Festival at Bridgeport Lane Park in Valencia.

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