

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contacts:

Dawn Montecalvo, Executive Director, NCEF, 239-514-2239, dawn@napleswinefestival.com
Andrea Steffy, PR Counsel, Gravina, Smith & Matte, 239-275-5758, asteffy@gravinasmith.com

**RESTAURANT LEGENDS, TV CHEFS AND RISING-CULINARY STARS TO
PREPARE THEIR FAMOUS CUISINE AT 2009 NAPLES WINTER WINE FESTIVAL**

NAPLES, Fla. (Aug. 18, 2008) – Seventeen chefs among the best-of-the-best will gather on Feb. 6 to prepare their highly sought-after cuisine at the 2009 Naples Winter Wine Festival in Naples, Fla. The festival includes a nationally famous restaurateur and television personality (Emeril Lagasse), the chef at a Michelin three-star restaurant (Jonathan Benno of Per Se), a chef whose cuisine was rated No. 2 in the United States by Travel + Leisure magazine (Adam Cooke of Blackberry Farm), one of the Top 5 Chefs to Watch according to Bon Appetit magazine (Linton Hopkins of Restaurant Eugene), a recipient of the Mobil Travel Guide Four-Star Rating for seven straight years (Bob Kinkead of Kinkead’s), chef of the longest-running cooking show on TV (Mary Ann Esposito of “Ciao Italia” on PBS), and other highly acclaimed culinary masters.

At Friday evening vintner dinners, the chefs will prepare cuisine for 600 guests at 17 palatial homes of trustees of the Naples Children & Education Foundation (NCEF), founders of the festival. The intimate dinners, which follow a tour of children’s charities and a wine-tasting luncheon, also feature renowned vintners from around the world who personally pour their finest wines selected to complement the celebrity chefs’ cuisine.

According to Grace Evenstad, NCEF trustee and co-chair of the chefs committee, 12 of the chefs are first-time festival participants. “It’s fun to bring in new chefs,” she said. “It keeps the festival fresh and exciting, and there are so many great chefs in this country.”

Five chefs are from the South, the most ever, including John Besh of New Orleans, who defeated Mario Batali in a 2006 “Iron Chef America” TV competition, and Sean Brock, a 2008 nominee for Rising Star Chef of the Year by the James Beard Foundation. A chef from outside the U.S. will participate: Tetsuya Wakuda, whose namesake restaurant in Australia was ranked among the world’s best in 2006 and 2007 by Restaurant Magazine.

(more)

2-2-2-2/Restaurant Legends, TV Chefs and Rising Culinary Stars to Prepare Famous Cuisine

Among the returning chefs are James Beard Foundation honorees Michael Tusk, 2008 Best Chef - Pacific - nominee; David Waltuck, 2007 Best Chef - New York City; and Mark Kiffin, 2005 Best Chef - Southwest. Also returning is Norman Van Aken, Food Arts Silver Spoon for Lifetime Achievement award winner.

Chef de Cuisine

The fifth returning chef is Emeril Lagasse—master chef, star of “Emeril Live,” cookbook author, owner of 11 restaurants and winner of multiple culinary awards. He also participated in the 2006 and 2007 festivals and, for 2009, is being honored as the Chef de Cuisine. The designation celebrates his culinary stature and acknowledges his support of the festival and assistance in securing other top chefs. “Emeril has a long list of commitments, and for him to come back to the festival is truly remarkable and a great honor,” said Evenstad. “He is a draw not only for the festival, but also for the community. In 2007, his book signing at a Naples bookstore drew thousands who stood in line for hours to get his autograph.”

Other participating luminaries for 2009 are Marco Canora, chef at Insieme, which was named one of the best new restaurants in 2007 by The New York Times and New York Magazine; Michael Mina, who has 12 restaurants and a host of awards including the AAA Four-Diamond Award in 2007 and Best San Francisco Restaurant and Chef in 2006 by Wine Spectator; John Tesar, chef of Mansion Restaurant at Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek, which was named Travel + Leisure magazine’s 500 Best Hotels and Resorts in 2008; and Michael White, chef at Alto restaurant, which Food and Wine Magazine put on its “Go List” in 2008. In 2007, Alto also won Wine Spectator’s Award of Excellence and a three-star rating by The New York Times.

“John Tesar and Michael White are indicative of the stellar quality of chefs coming to the festival,” said Donna Solimene, NCEF trustee and co-chair of the 2009 chefs committee. “They each took over a highly acclaimed restaurant and have raised the bar there even higher, something that is very tough to do.”

(more)

3-3-3-3/Restaurant Legends, TV Chefs and Rising Culinary Stars to Prepare Famous Cuisine

2009 Naples Winter Wine Festival Celebrity Chefs Roster

Jonathan Benno

Per Se
New York

Mark Kiffin

The Compound Restaurant
Santa Fe

Tetsuya Wakuda

Tetsuya's
Sydney

John Besh

Restaurant August
New Orleans

Bob Kinkead

Kinkead's
Washington, D.C.

David Waltuck

Chanterelle
New York

Sean Brock

McCrary's Restaurant
Charleston

Emeril Lagasse

Emeril's
New Orleans

Michael White

Alto
New York

Marco Canora

Insieme
New York

Michael Mina

Michael Mina Group
San Francisco

Adam Cooke

Blackberry Farm
Walland, Tennessee

John Tesar

Mansion Restaurant
Dallas

Mary Ann Esposito

"Ciao Italia"
PBS

Michael Tusk

Quince Restaurant
San Francisco

Linton Hopkins

Restaurant Eugene
Atlanta

Norman Van Aken

Norman's
Orlando

(more)

4-4-4-4/Restaurant Legends, TV Chefs and Rising Culinary Stars to Prepare Famous Cuisine

Other Festival Highlights

Talented chefs prepare the finest cuisine paired with exquisite wine throughout the Feb. 6-8 festival. Saturday's lunch extravaganza and wine tasting takes place on the grand lawn of The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples, and precedes the world-class auction of fine wines, luxury trips and special automobiles. Executive Chef Derin Moore, a Certified Master Chef, oversees exquisite culinary action stations prepared under the direction of Henry Heng, the resort's Chef de Cuisine. The culinary team includes alumni-and-current distinguished chefs of The Ritz-Carlton, Naples. Executive chefs from WCI Communities, led by Rob DeFrancesco, executive chef for WCI's Tiburón Golf Club, prepare the farewell celebration brunch on Sunday. The Ritz-Carlton and WCI are both founding sponsors of the festival.

The Naples Winter Wine Festival is the most successful charity wine auction in the world. It is ranked by the Luxury Institute as a top 10 arts and entertainment event for wealthy Americans and by Wine Spectator magazine as the nation's top charity wine auction since 2004. The festival was founded by and is hosted annually in Naples, Fla., by trustees of the Naples Children & Education Foundation. Their vision was to create an exquisite event that would raise funds for area charities that assist underprivileged and at-risk children. Since the first festival in 2001, \$69.5 million has been raised toward making a profound and sustainable difference for children in need.

Festival ticket packages are \$7,500 per couple; \$20,000 for reserved seating at the same vintner dinner for two couples. For a schedule of 2009 festivities and more information about the Naples Winter Wine Festival, please visit www.napleswinefestival.com, or call the wine festival office at 888-837-4919.