

Vegetables Bring in \$100,000 at Sotheby's

by Florence Fabricant

Last night the old masters up for auction at Sotheby's on York Avenue were heirloom vegetables. And they brought in more than \$100,000 to support local farming programs.

"I've never sold some of these things," said Jamie Niven, the auctioneer, who added that he had presided over more than 600 charity auctions. "I'm amazed."

He got \$3,200 for Greenmarket tours, lunch and a gala dinner; \$1,000 each for the ten crates of vegetables—Joe's Round peppers, Turkey Crow beans, Winningstadt cabbages, Lady Godiva squash, and Striped Toga eggplants, among others—that would be sent to food pantries; \$2,400 each from two bidders for a visit to a Manhattan bee-keeper; and \$3,400 for 10 live heritage geese, ducks, chickens and turkeys. In addition to the live auction, there was a silent auction of 18 items, including vegetables, heirloom seeds, dinners, food gifts and books.

The day-long event, called The Art of Farming, was dreamed up by Brent Ridge, a Hudson Valley goat farmer who showed up in a black suit and Wellies. Dr. Ridge, one of the "Fabulous Beekman Boys" on Planet Green network, had only to pitch it to Amy Todd Middleton, an enthusiastic gardener who is in charge of marketing at Sotheby's, and the auction house was on board.

They decided to make the Sylvia Center at Katchkie Farm, which teaches city school children about farming and cooking, one of

the beneficiaries. The farm is run by GREAT PERFORMANCES, Sotheby's in-house caterer. A new program, the New Farmers Development Project at GrowNYC, which works with immigrant farmers, shared the proceeds. Bette Midler, April Gornik, Joan Gussow, Zakary Pelaccio, Ruth Reichl, Martha Stewart and Eric Ripert were among the supporters.

During the cocktail hour—celery swizzle sticks, of course—farmers in denim mingled with men in suits and women in stilettos, perhaps another first for Sotheby's. Later, at the \$1,000-a-plate dinner for big contributors, a working farmer was seated at every table. A proclamation from Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, declaring Sept. 19th through 26th to be official heirloom vegetable week, was read, with the observation that the mayor's favorite vegetable is steak.



With all due respect to City Hall, the heirlooms grabbed the spotlight: a splendid tomato first course from Dan Kluger of ABC Kitchen; caramelized Hubbard squash, by Jeff Gimmel of Swoon Kitchenbar, that was able to mimic a sea scallop; and a vegetable lasagna, the vegetarian choice from GREAT PERFORMANCES that outshone Andaz Fifth Avenue's Roberto Alicia's roasted pork shoulder with kale, the other main course option.

On the way out the door, guests could drop a \$20 bill for a bag of vegetables, adding another \$2,000 or so to the bottom line, which finally came to at least \$250,000. To honor vegetables.

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