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A weekly call to action for volunteers

1976 MG, 1947 Lincoln convertible to be auctioned
at Healdsburg gala for Healthcare Foundation Northern Sonoma County



JEFF KAN LEEK/The Press Democrat

Denny Murphy, left, and Jim Fagan are restoring this 1947 Lincoln Continental Cabriolet convertible for auction to benefit Healthcare Foundation Northern Sonoma County, which supports the work of the Healdsburg District Hospital.

Chassis for charity

By **RAYNE WOLFE**
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Putting on a black-tie fundraising gala takes dedicated volunteers, lots of energy and, in most cases, a signature event.

For the annual Vines & Wines Gala and Auction on Saturday, the event is a vintage car auction.

That's where Jim Fagan comes in.

After retiring from Pacific Bell in 1988 after 31 years in several professional roles, Fagan and his wife, Barbara Fagan, looked around for a new home base. In 1991, they settled on Healdsburg, leaving their Piedmont home and heading north.

"What we found was that people in Healdsburg really do care when they ask, 'How are you?' I've never lived anywhere where I enjoyed my friends and neighbors so much," Fagan said.

A confessed car nut, he hoped to find a way to put his creative energy for restoring cars to a good purpose. Since 1999, he's been the go-to guy for getting donated automobiles for Vines & Wines. He leads a

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posse of wrenchers and wranglers who identify, fix and deliver gleaming objects worthy of spirited bidding.

"Jim is an amazing resource for us. Where he comes up with these cars, I don't know. He's brought us everything from Jags to pickup trucks, all beautiful," said Denny Murphy, who with his wife, Katie Wetzel Murphy, puts on the event.

Now in its seventh year, the gala has raised more than \$1 million for Healthcare Foundation Northern Sonoma County, established in 2001 to raise funds to support health care services for residents from Windsor to the Mendocino County line.

Fagan's reputation for delivering the goods began his first year on the job with a red 1955 Ford T-Bird.

"The bidding was great on that car. The market then was about \$25,000, \$30,000 — and the bidding just whizzed through that, stopping at \$47,500," Fagan said.

This year's chairman and chairwoman for Vines & Wines personally the pairing of good wine and a good cause.

Denny Murphy's family is

known for the Murphy-Goode wine brand, which recently was purchased by Kendall-Jackson, while Katie Wetzel Murphy's family owns Alexander Valley Vineyards.

Her parents, Harry and Maggie Wetzel, recently donated \$2 million to Healthcare Foundation Northern Sonoma County, which will use it to build a new emergency room at Healdsburg District Hospital.

"Healdsburg Hospital is so important to the community. It's the anchor to hold the local family practitioners here," said Denny Murphy, who is part of a wider effort to strengthen, upgrade and expand services.

The auction helps provide funding.

"We have a highly trained group of specialists who go over the car so we can guarantee it to the end of the driveway," Fagan joked. He not only credits Denny Murphy with volunteering as a part-time mechanic but relies on friend Bruce Blaikie, a retired engineer and wiring guru, and Chuck Silvester, owner of ABC Towing, for picking up and delivering the auction cars.

He said his team shares a love of vintage cars, red wine and the Healdsburg lifestyle.

"The cars we work on have been loved by their previous owners, so we check out every system, put air in the tires, road test them. Sometimes, we get calls after the auction that a dash light won't come on, and we get it fixed. It's sort of like giving away puppies — you're always looking for them and happy to see them doing well," he said.

This year, the auction will include two cars: a Tahitian blue 1976 MG Roadster and a gray-blue 1947 Lincoln Continental Cabriolet convertible.

"In this month's edition of Automobile Magazine, they had a story about the 25 most beautiful cars ever built on the planet. The 1947 Lincoln is ranked tenth. It really is gorgeous," Fagan said.

To learn more about the Vines & Wines Gala and Auction, visit www.VinesAndWines.org or call 473-0583.

You can reach Staff Writer
Rayne Wolfe at 521-5240 or
rwolfe@pressdemocrat.com.

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