

# LIQUID GOLD

The Legacy Cellar Foundation allows wine enthusiasts to turn their collections into cash for their favorite charities.

*Written by Bridget Williams*

"A lot of time, people don't think about wine as an asset," said Garth Hodgdon, Director of The Legacy Cellar Foundation. "Serious wine collection is intentional, and collectors often have more wine in their cellar than they could ever drink." And this is where The Legacy Foundation steps in. The privately endowed 501(c)(3) donor-advised fund collects, authenticates, and liquidates wine collections for charitable purposes.


An Advanced Sommelier through the Court of Master Sommeliers, Hodgdon boasts impressive chops in the wine industry, including stints as head sommelier at Thomas Keller's Bouchon Bistro, The French Laundry, and Per Se, followed by five years as United States ambassador for Krug Champagne. He likes to say, "anywhere Krug Champagne was being opened, I was there."

The opportunity to run The Legacy Foundation arose during the pandemic while Hodgdon and his wife lived in Chicago. Having "retired" from being a sommelier, the notion that he could use his expertise for good and interact with some of the foremost wine collectors in the United States was instantly appealing. However, it wasn't until he started work that he realized the magnitude of the charitable aspect. "Up to that point, philanthropy hasn't appeared on my radar," he explained. "But after working with and helping tons and tons of different types of charities, from José Andrés' World Central Kitchen to Sea Shepherd, my mind is blown every single day by the important work carried out by the charities we support."

What sets The Legacy Cellar apart from other auction houses and sales outlets is that as a privately endowed entity, one hundred percent of a bottle or cellar's value goes to the donor's designated charity. The organization made a big splash in Bel Air, California, this past May at their inaugural event, "A Goliath 60th Celebration," which honored the 60th anniversary of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. The auction's centerpiece, which raised more than \$3 million, was a massive 27-liter "goliath" bottle of 2003 Sine Qua Non The Inaugural Syrah. This priceless 100-point wine—the only bottle of its kind in the world—was donated by wine critic Robert M. Parker, Jr.

While the live auction format is certainly a go-to for obtaining top dollar, Hodgdon explained that his number one directive is to get the highest value for a wine donation. This gives him the freedom to approach individual collectors, for instance, if he believes that's the best means to an end.

"The idea is that any amount directed to charity is good," said Garth. Currently, no minimum value is required for a donation to be handled by The Legacy Foundation. Hodgdon initiates the vetting process through a phone call, discussing areas such as storage and provenance. "It's an easy conversation to have and nice for donors because I understand their passion and can speak to them at their level," he added.

To date, Hodgdon has worked with approximately 25 donors. The list includes people interested in selling a few bottles to make room for more, people who have inherited a collection and aren't sure what to do with it, and those looking to sell their entire cellar. "It's a low-stress process, and the wine goes to the best place: fellow wine enthusiasts who will drink it and appreciate it as much as the donor." Even better, Hodgdon emphasized, is that a donor can see the impact of a gift without dipping into their cash reserves or relying on a bequest to carry out their charitable intentions. 

*For more information and to become a Legacy Cellar insider, which provides access to exclusive events and first notice of new cellars available for sale, visit [legacycellar.org](http://legacycellar.org).*

Legacy Cellar Foundation Director Garth Hodgdon with the 27-liter "goliath" bottle of 2003 Sine Qua Non The Inaugural Syrah donated by Robert M. Parker, Jr. for an auction to benefit St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. *Photo by Drew Ruiz*

