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Features | September 8, 2011

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## Still rocking, for charity, after all these years

Posted on September 8, 2011 by Sonoma Valley Sun



Photo: Pat Johnson

### By Mike Hyland – Sun Music Writer

“It’s hard to believe we’ve been doing this for 25 years now,” reflects Bruce Cohn, sitting in his office on the winery grounds, recalling the early days of the B.R. Cohn Charity Events Fall Music Festival. “The very first show we did featured Graham Nash, Nicolette Larson and Little Feat and we made a whopping \$500.”

“It was a beginning,” Cohn says. “It kept growing each year and eventually it took on a life of its own.”

Cohn is surrounded by numerous gold and platinum records by the Doobie Brothers and others, and his outer office waiting area is piled high with trade publications like “Billboard” to keep up with his music business interests and “Wines & Vines” for the winery. His mind, though, is on those less fortunate.

“There are a lot of people hurting out there, and a lot of times, those of us who live in an area like Sonoma lose sight of that,” he says.

**B.R. COHN CHARITY EVENTS**

# FALL MUSIC FESTIVAL

**SEPTEMBER**  
24 & 25



SAT. 24	SUN. 25
<b>Doobie Brothers</b>	<b>Lynyrd Skynyrd</b>
<b>Sammy Hagar &amp; Joe Satriani</b>	<b>Doobie Brothers</b>
<b>Leon Russell</b>	<b>Jim Messina</b>
<b>Jim Messina</b>	<b>Little Feat</b>
<b>Greg Kihn</b>	<b>Leon Russell</b>
<b>Jeff Watson &amp; Lone Ranger</b>	<b>Lara Johnston</b>
<b>Carlos Reyes</b>	<b>Carlos Reyes</b>

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While the emphasis is on music and, of course, B.R. Cohn Wines, the bottom line is that a lot of people nationwide benefit from the music series that Bruce, his staff and the Doobie Brothers started a quarter of a century ago. Over the years the events have raised more than six million dollars for “some 50 to 60 charities and the vets.”

The fall event actually began as a golf tournament, “but it didn’t generate enough profit so we started the concerts and then along came the charity auction and dinner, and now we have a major undertaking,” Cohn recalls.

This year’s roster set to rock on Saturday and Sunday, September 24 and 25 includes The Doobie Brothers, newly inducted member of the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame Leon Russell, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Little Feat, Sammy Hagar, Joe Satriani, Jim Messina, Greg Kihn and Sonoma favorite Carlos Reyes.

It’s another weekend of shows that has Cohn pretty pumped. “I start making calls early on and probably contact some 75 managers or acts to check availability,” says Bruce. “You gotta make all those calls to come up with eight to ten acts, and,” he stresses, “they waive their fees and just get expenses. That’s another reason why these shows have become so successful for the charities.”

This year’s festival is dedicated to the memory of Marty Cohn, Bruce’s brother, who passed away earlier this year after a battle with cancer. A new second stage will be named for Marty and will feature Saturday performances by Lara Johnston with Will Champlin, the Zen Road Pilots (formerly Billy Satellite) and Eddie Bush. The Sunday performers will feature the Rich Little Band, Black Market Blues and Frobeck.

“I am very excited to have Leon Russell and Lynyrd Skynyrd perform this year, the first time for both,” enthuses Bruce. “Plus Sammy Hagar and Joe Satriani joining in with the Doobie Brothers, I think it’s going to be a pretty magical weekend of shows.”

Before all of the rock ‘n’ roll frivolity, however, the

Bruce's wildly popular charity auction and dinner comes first on Friday, September 23 in the winery's 140-year-old Olive Grove beginning at 6 p.m. Television chef and local hero Guy Fieri will serve as guest chef for the dinner. Fieri will bring his excitement and energy to prepare this year's dinner to be paired with B.R. Cohn wines.

The third component of the weekend is the golf tournament. The event takes place at the Sonoma Golf Club on Monday, September 26. Tee-off is 11 a.m.

Green fees are \$400 and include a special custom made olive wood putter from Musty Putters made from the 140-year old olive trees on the winery property. Golf also includes a seat at the Friday night dinner with Guy Fieri.

But it doesn't take long for a conversation with Bruce to come back around to the charities, and especially the veteran organizations, that receive the proceeds. "There are a lot of people hurting out there, and a lot of times, those of us who live in an area like Sonoma lose sight of that," says Bruce. "We do a variety of projects all year long to help with veterans causes, that's something that has been going on for some 27 years now. Proceeds from the Doobie Red wine, numerous auctions, and some concerts here and there, have all been for vet causes."

Meanwhile, the North Bay charity recipients this year include: Sonoma Valley Mentoring Alliance, Redwood Empire Food Bank, Glide Memorial, Santa Rosa Memorial Trauma Center, the Sonoma Valley Education Foundation and of course, the local and national veterans organizations.

"We are just a handful of people with a lot of volunteers that help us out when the weekend comes around," says Bruce. "But we all get the feeling that we are doing something good for the community, and that's what keeps us all going."

The opening line of the news release announcing this year's events stated, "Vintner, philanthropist, and music artist manager Bruce Cohen

announced...” And while he is all of those, one thing he is not is an egotist. He shares the credit for the success of these endeavors with his team. The years of raising funds and awareness for charitable organizations is quite a legacy and Cohn, who makes it look all so easy, is enjoying every minute of it.



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