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Raising a Glass to Raise Funds

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This year, [John Markley](#) hunted down hard to find wines from the Rhone region of France for the annual wine tasting benefit for [The Wooden Floor](#), an after school dance program in Santa Ana for disadvantaged kids.

The Newport Beach philanthropist collected 420 bottles of wine for the event: 12 types of French wine, all rated an average of 95 and above by The Wine Advocate and two types of California Rhones, one white and one red, both rated 94.

A couple of weeks ago, [Big Canyon Country Club's](#) master sommelier Steven Poe cracked open a bottle of each to taste them. He typically spits wine out when he tastes it. He couldn't bring himself to do that for three of these wines, though. They were so good, he swallowed.

"He called them pinots on steroids," Markley says, adding that the 2007 reds he has collected are considered "the best Rhone vintages produced in 20 years."

On Thursday night, 300 lucky ticketholders will get to taste the wines at the Keep the Promise benefit at Big Canyon in Newport Beach. The crowd is expected to include serious wine drinkers and serious philanthropists.

Poe, a master sommelier (one of fewer than 200 worldwide who hold that title) says the star of this event will be the Chateauneuf du Pape, yielding "one of a kind beauty that is sure to amaze and delight all those fortunate enough to indulge."

Poe worked with the chef at Big Canyon to pair each wine with an appetizer.

Tickets are \$250 a pop, and Markley expects the benefit to raise at least \$140,000 for The Wooden Floor. He does not reimburse himself for any of the money he spent to buy the wine, which this year, he admitted after a little nudging, was \$35,000.

The event is called Keep the Promise because The Wooden Floor's goal is to prepare kids for college. In addition to learning all forms of dance, the kids (they accept 375 a year) get tutoring. The program has done such a good job that 100 percent of their graduating seniors in the past few years have gone on to college, from Wellesley to NYU to UCLA. But they're often too poor to pay for it. So The Wooden Floor gives them scholarships, thus keeping the promise.