

Fine Wine and Good Times = Clean Water!

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By Kevin Gartland, Flathead Beacon

One of the Montana's premier wine events returns next week to The Lodge at Whitefish Lake – the annual Whitefish Wine Auction, presented by the folks at the Whitefish Lake Institute.

The two-day event – set for the evenings of July 25-26 – is a fundraiser to support the science and education programs of the Institute, with proceeds from this year's auction funding the completion and maintenance of the Living Wetlands Interpretive Nature Trail.

The event kicks off on Thursday night with a relaxing evening of wine tasting and hors d'oeuvres in a spectacular setting on the shores of Whitefish Lake. Attendees will join award-winning winemakers for an international wine-tasting journey, while enjoying some great live music by Fresh Off the Vine and having a chance to score some outstanding raffle prizes.

Friday, of course, is the "big night," beginning with a hosted wine social hour and silent auction, followed by a four-course family style meal – each course paired with wines from featured wine sponsor Foley Family Wines.

This year's guest emcee and auctioneer is the effervescent Missoula Mayor John Engen, who is donating his time to help Whitefish and WLI to keep Whitefish Lake clean and safe. Guests will have the opportunity to bid on specialty wine lots, winery tours, memory-making adventures, one-of-a-kind artwork and an assortment of unique items.

The Whitefish Wine Auction is supported by more than 50 different businesses and community organizations that donate services, products and outdoor adventures to the cause. Tickets for the Thursday night wine tasting event are \$30 per person; seats for Friday's Wine Auction & Dinner are \$80 per person; or you can purchase a two-day "combo" ticket for \$90. For tickets and more information about the Whitefish Wine Auction, visit whitefishwineauction.org.

Perhaps the best part about the event, however, is the organization it benefits: the Whitefish Lake Institute.

WLI has been serving the community of Whitefish since 2005. A science and education based nonprofit, WLI partners with other organizations to creatively fund research and develop programs that benefit and protect Whitefish Lake and other local water resources.

Its latest project, the Living Wetlands Interpretive Nature Trail, opened to the public on July 13. The trail is wheelchair friendly, and offers a beautiful forested wetland respite and outdoor classroom. The main trailhead is on the east side of Wisconsin Avenue between Crestwood Resort and The Viking Lodge, just across and slightly south of The Lodge at Whitefish Lake.

Over the course of the last seven-plus years, WLI has implemented a long-term monitoring program for Whitefish Lake, its tributaries and the Whitefish River; it authored a report that led to the initial funding for boat gasoline pollution mitigation at City Beach; it hosted six summer college interns; and contributed to getting petroleum seepage cleaned up at the site of the 1989 Mackinaw Bay train derailment.

The Institute has also protected 28.8 acres of important wetland habitat; and it partnered with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the Flathead Basin Commission to develop the Northwest Montana Lakes Volunteer Monitoring Network, which monitors 40 different lakes in Flathead, Lincoln, Lake and Missoula counties.

WLI is funded by a broad base of members, through research and education grants, special events, and by creating programmatic partnerships with other organizations and resource agencies. Together, these organizations are investing in the future of our community. For more information on the Whitefish Lake Institute, visit www.whitefishlake.org.