

Chamber of Commerce discusses 2019 Summer Nightly Indian Dances

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
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Contracts for 2020 season up in the air

The Gallup City Council heard a presentation about the 2019 Summer Nightly Indian Dances and the plans going forward for the 2020 season at their Nov. 12 meeting.

Bill Lee, CEO of Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce, gave the presentation on the 2019 season to the council. According to the information he provided at the meeting, this year saw over 19,000 guests attend the dances during their 99-day span. There was an average of 202 visitors a night to watch 13 different dance groups.

However, the total number of guests is a drop from 2018, which had over 24,000 guests, and that is a further drop from the highest attendance in the past decade in 2017, with over 25,000 guests.

Lee said there were a number of reasons for the decrease in attendance.

The earlier start to the academic year for local schools is one such factor, which makes it difficult to schedule dances with certain groups.

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“Many of the dance groups are family-oriented and bring their children with them,” Lee said. “This makes it more difficult to schedule dances with them.”

The other factor in the attendance decrease is the advent of the Native American Arts Market and the Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial both becoming a larger part of the Gallup community, especially with the Ceremonial’s 100th year on the horizon, Lee added.

Lee said each of these events begin to collide and overlap with one another in the early part of August. To that end, he suggested shortening the Nightly Indian Dances season in 2020 to 75 days, with the end of the season coinciding with the start of the Ceremonial.

This decision was made as a way to trim costs and begin a shift in direction toward quality of dancers, rather than quantity of dancers, Lee said. The dances would still run seven days a week.

“We are anticipating higher costs for next year’s Nightly Indian Dances, primarily for security,” Lee said. “The state’s minimum wage is going up, which is going to affect all state businesses, including the city and county.”

When asked about other issues that came into play for the idea to shorten the season, Lee mentioned how each year they have had a number of vendors who signed up for a spot to set up at the dances, but then did not return on future dates.

“It’s better to focus on the dance and cultural aspect rather than the vending aspect,” Lee said.

The second item involving the Summer Nightly Indian Dances was the approval of contracts for the 2020 season. The contracts detailed how shortening the season by about a month would reduce the contract cost on the Lodgers Tax Committee from \$65,000 to \$55,000.

This includes the minimum wage increases Lee spoke about, as well as pursuing a

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quality-over-quantity angle, and also hiring a permanent professional emcee for the whole summer.

Jennifer Lazarz, tourism and marketing manager for the City of Gallup said that the city plans to make up for any lost revenue by shortening the Summer Nightly Indian Dances season.

“We have been working on something with the international market, which is introducing them to our businesses and having more of an economic impact,” Lazarz said.

This project includes giving tours of local landmarks to international visitors after the summer ends, which could in turn give a boost to local businesses.

Despite a recommendation from the Lodgers Tax Committee to approve the services agreement, the council was hesitant to do so with the data on hand, or lack thereof.

Dist. 4 Councilor Fran Palochak said seeing the daily attendance numbers for August, the month that would be removed under the revised contract, would help the council to make an informed decision on whether or not to approve the contracts.

Then, Dist. 2 Councilor Allan Landavazo made the motion to table the contracts, saying the council should consider the information and potential impact they were given by Lee.

“I don’t think it’s going to be the same [revenue] or an improvement,” Landavazo said. “We aren’t necessarily catering to the world or enhancing tourism by doing [this].”

Mayor Jackie McKinney said while the proposed budget would be smaller, it would be irresponsible for the city to not use funds to enhance tourism for the city and help the city and local businesses reach their full economic potential.

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“I don’t think saving a nickel is going to help as much as what we receive from people who come into town,” McKinney said.

The decision to table the item for a later date was approved with a 5-0 vote.

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