

Wild Thing bull riding slated for July

Written by By Kevin Opsahl Sun Correspondent
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WildThing Championship Bull Riding event, canceled last year because of the coronavirus pandemic, will go on this year as organizers had hoped.

The Gallup City Council voted to allow the event to be held July 9 and 10 at Red Rock Park at 825 Outlaw Rd, Church Rock, N.M. .

That decision comes just weeks after the council gave the green light to another popular event in the city, the Best of the Best Rodeo — though the two events are not related.

WildThing's producer, Larry Peterson, spoke in glowing terms about the fact that the bull riding competition is able to take place this year. He said the event puts Gallup on the map, has been filmed and covered in national bull riding magazines. Not only that, it helps the Gallup-based Manuelito Navajo Children's Home.

"What a great thing for the community and the children's home and everybody involved," he said. "We're really wanting to keep life breathed into this and use the fantastic facility out there, and that's where we're at. We're hoping to get to have the event this year so it's not a three-year gap."

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The last time the event was held was 2019 and Peterson told the council on April 13, before its approval, he did not want to see the championship be canceled again. But things have been looking up for people like Peterson, who want to hold big events in their communities. The New Mexico Department of Health recently changed the status of McKinley County's public health restrictions from "red" to "turquoise," meaning that it can hold large gatherings with up to 150 people or 200 cars.

"We're hoping the restrictions are going to be even lighter and better than they are now, but we're trying to get things worked out best we can," Peterson said. "It's just quite a struggle with none of us, you all included, dealing with all this before,

"But hopefully it's going to be better and better two months from now," he said.

Dist. 4 Councilwoman Fran Palochak said she is very excited that the bull riding championship will be able to take place.

"I just want to mention again that we all have to stick to the COVID requirements and safe distances for spectators and for also folks that are riding," she stressed. "But I'm sure you're going to do that, and I look forward to going out there and seeing what's going on."

Dist. 2 Councilman Michael Schaaf said Gallup needs events like the bull riding championship.

"Wild Thing is one of the best events we have in this city, so we need to keep it and support it as much as we can," he said.

Dist. 3 Councilor Yogash Kumar expressed the need for residents to get out and about after being home so much of the time during the pandemic.

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“This is an outdoor event and hopefully it does go on, and we have a large enough crowd, a safe crowd,” he said.

Gallup Mayor Louis Bonaguidi praised Peterson after the council's decision was made.

“Larry, I’m going to withhold the congratulations until after it’s over with because I’m hoping, like you, that it’s opened up and we can get as many people in that facility as possible,” he said.

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