

Official: Annual Ceremonial coming ‘back’

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Event president predicts event will grow

It's not a stretch to say the annual Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial was losing some of its appeal to people not only from New Mexico and Arizona, but throughout the United States.

The rodeos weren't what they used to be. Exhibit Hall participation was down. And enthusiasm for the event — which has been one of Gallup's most popular throughout its 95-year history — was paling.

Not anymore, the event's current president said.

"We think we can keep growing and growing and making the event as popular and as well-attended as it used to be," Ceremonial President Dudley Byerley told the Sun this week. "We think we can get the big advertisers again. We want to include downtown a little more. We're excited for what next year holds."

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Overall, Byerley said this year's event went well, with a few "hiccups," as this was the first time many volunteers and regulars worked together.

Despite any growing pains, Old School Days Rodeo, which was brought back for the first time in decades, proved a huge draw.

"That event brought the house down," Byerley said. "It was a big hit. People from all over — especially the area folks from around the Navajo and Zuni reservations who've been coming here for years — just loved it."

The Old School Days Rodeo was held on the last day of the event and featured, along with buffalo riding, no admission fee. The city's Business Improvement District picked up Sunday's \$10 fee, which was implemented in 2016 and allowed people to attend the rodeos, dances, and exhibits for one price — a first for Ceremonial.

"[Old School Days] hasn't been around in almost 50 years," Byerley said.

He credited Joe and Cindy Tanner with making the Exhibit Hall a popular attraction.

"They did a wonderful job. There were a lot of people in there. Ben Welch [city community services coordinator] did an excellent job of helping, as well as troubleshooting."

Byerley, an Oklahoma native who grew up around rodeos of every kind, said he'd like to raise the prize money for artists who have booths in the hall.

"I want to get it to where it used to be," he said. "I think you'd see more artists as a result. The \$75,000 to \$100,000 prize range is a good goal."

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It's also important, Byerley said, to draw even more people to Ceremonial from Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and Flagstaff.

“We'll have several new committees” for 2017, he said. “We got to get more people from those three locales. That's a start.”

The event president mentioned the need for social-media outlets like Facebook and a revamped website to spread the event's reach.

“I want to do more stuff in town, in Gallup,” Byerley said. “You know, do some things to get people to come downtown and to go to the various places downtown. I'm also thinking of maybe getting weavers and painters downtown.”

Byerley said he wants to keep people in Gallup for three or four days, wherein they'd attend the event for a day or so and then visit other venues and attractions. Adding an extra day or two in 2017 is an idea that's on the table, too.

Byerley, who owns Cowtown Feed and Livestock off U.S. 491, noted that New Mexico Tourism Department Cabinet Secretary Rebecca Latham visited this year. He thanked the city for its support, and said more locals have been curious about becoming involved with all aspects of the event.

“I've been meeting and talking to a lot of the old-timers from all around the area,” Byerley said. “The Ceremonial is back, and we're going to grow.”

***By Bernie Dotson
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