

New events to spice up Gallup Ceremonial tradition

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
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Centennial celebration plans in the works

Visitors to this year's Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial in August will find new attractions alongside old favorites as the event celebrates its 100th year.

Details are still firming up, but organizers are seeking to balance traditional events like the rodeo, parades, wine tasting, pow wow and pageants with new items this year including a Native Film Festival and a Native Skate Jam.

Two groups are working to put on the Ceremonial: the local Gallup Inter Tribal Indian Ceremonial Association, which has put on the event for a century, and the state tourism department-sponsored Intertribal Ceremonial Office, which joined the efforts last year.

The former is working on traditional and historical events, while the latter is doing "broader programming to complement the established events," ICO Executive Director Melissa Sanchez said. "The goal is to design a unified brand for both organizations, as well as use the individual brands of ICO and GITICA."

The result will be 10 days of Ceremonial and related events Aug. 4-14.

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ICO will again manage online events and the Ceremonial Queen pageant. Plus, fans will be happy to see the crowd-pleasing tiny tot pageant returning for the centennial with City Councilor Fran Palochak as chairperson.

Some events begun to accommodate pandemic restrictions for last year's ceremonial will return this year, including a virtual artisan market. The ICO will also have a live artisan market at Red Rock Park for one weekend this year.

Sanchez praised the artisans' work and said, "We want to make it pretty and put some cool lighting on it." That market will be separate from the juried art show and market sponsored by GITICA, and will not award prizes.

"The Spirit of the Ceremonial," a documentary that debuted last year, will again air on KOB ahead of the live event.

New this year will be a Ceremonial Film Festival, featuring native filmmakers and actors, at El Morro Theatre Aug, 6-10. The festival will "focus on bringing filmmakers, actors and audiences together with a focus on Native American and indigenous storytelling and inspiring support of their storytelling in TV and film," Sanchez said.

The owners of Enchantment Skate Shop have plans to put on a Native Skate Jam at the Gallup Skatepark Aug. 6.

"They are going to be putting on a Skate Jam at the park and bringing in skate vendors, with the idea of celebrating indigenous skateboarding in Gallup," City of Gallup Tourism and Marketing Manager Jennifer Lazarz said.

Sanchez is planning a show of Native and Indigenous songs and dancing for two nights of the event. She described the "One World Beat" show for the City Council at its April 5 special meeting:

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“Both shows will begin with a Native American and Indigenous Tribal procession and become a continuous showcase of regalia, songs and dances. Led by Eagle Dancers, the tribal group singers will lead each group and be on the stage singing.

As the next group enters, the songs will transition to the next tribe’s songs. All the Native and Indigenous people will enter to their songs and be connected by dancing to all the songs,” she said. “The entry will segue into a stage show featuring a Native American host or hosts, and two or three acts with a finale planned as well.”

After the shows, visitors will have a chance for a meet-and-greet with performers. Visitor surveys from previous years indicate that visitors want to know more about the performers and their cultures, Sanchez said, so the Cultural Connections post-show will provide that.

“After a performance, audience members will have an opportunity to attend an interactive event, along with an audience Q& A,” she said. “They will meet with dance groups, artists, musicians, so they can discuss their inspirations, influences and performances and just be there to answer questions.”

Sanchez is doing broader outreach this year, inviting tribes from well outside the American Southwest to participate. Among them, she said, are possible delegations from the Florida Seminole and possibly even Maori representatives from New Zealand.

Meanwhile, the local association will focus on the tried-and-true events. “Technically we are planning our separate events,” GITICA President Kyle Tom said. “Ours are the more traditional ones that date back to the first ceremonial 100 years ago. They are doing the newer, modern elements that they bring their expertise to.”

In addition to the rodeo – always the biggest draw of the ceremonial – the local association will present pow wows, a parade and 5k run, night dances and the juried art show, which will offer \$100,000 in prize money across categories this year. That’s up from \$40,000 last year.

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The show also provides sales that give the artisans – and their reputations – a boost, Tom said: “In 2021 we saw record sales in our gallery. The night of the wine gala we hit the \$40,000 mark. We went somewhere north of \$50,000 before the night was out.”

Traditional dance shows are also in important lure.

“Our night performance is the same one it’s been clear back to the first ceremonial,” Tom said. “That will include groups like the Acoma Pueblo deer dances, eagle dances, Navajo, Apache Crown Dancers, Aztecas. Many of the groups we bring in are descendants of the groups that started back at the beginning.”

In the Ceremonial’s early years, the event brought in about 3,500 people a year. But that was 100 years ago, when people were driving wagons, not F-150s. By 2019 it was up to 24,000, and last year’s pandemic-abbreviated Ceremonial brought in almost 37,000 visitors, Tom said.

“We have what works for us and we are trying to tweak it year by year,” he said. “We’d love to have the people that have been part of it for decades and generations come back.”

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Sun Correspondent