

## Eye level at the Freedom Festival

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent  
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### Street-level entertainment will take center stage

Visitors to this year's Freedom Festival may have their heads in the clouds, but the event will have its feet and wheels firmly on the ground.

The event, which is usually known as the Ride, Flight & Cruise weekend, won't include hot air balloons taking flight this year due to communication and scheduling issues. But despite the challenges of jump-starting a post-lockdown event, festival planners will not be deflated.

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The balloons are expected to be back next year, and this year's party will be all about the cars and motorcycles. And of course, the bands, kinetic performers and beer garden. The full schedule of July 30 events is free to attend.

Festivities begin July 29 for car show participants, who will gather for a barbecue in the Chamber of Commerce's parking lot, 106 U.S. Rte. 66.

"Then we have a police escort and they go on a cruise from Route 66 and First to Eighth Street, then come back on Aztec to First Street. It's a loop of the downtown area," Francis Bee, Gallup's Business Improvement District's director, said.

July 30 will start with a car, truck and street rod show from 8:30 am to 12 pm on West Aztec Avenue between Fourth and Fifth Streets.

This year's event will see the return of the Wise Fool circus performers mingling with the Courthouse Plaza crowd among vendors from 12 pm to 5 pm, followed by musicians the Silver Country Band taking the stage at 6 pm, and Black Pearl at 9 pm. In between, the second car cruise will roll up Aztec Avenue to set up for the tunnel that will welcome the motorcycles.

"Between 6 and 6:30 pm there's a procession of cars on Aztec," Bee said. "They park at a 45-degree angle, backed in against the curb with their lights facing east, so for one block on Aztec they have a mini-show."

The headlights will later form part of the Tunnel of Lights. Riders from the Endless Riders motorcycle group will roar in from their cross-state ride from Tukumcari after 8 pm.

"They get off I-40 at exit 26 and they get onto Route 66 and drive west. Then they get back on I-40 at exit 16 and drive to the Arizona state line, then they come back into Gallup, cut over Eighth Street and toward Aztec," Bee said.

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With no balloons, there will be no gas jets to fuel the traditional Tunnel of Fire, so organizers are working on producing a Tunnel of Light show to set the mood for the motorcycle parade's grand entrance. The tunnel is expected to light up Aztec Avenue between Third and Eighth Streets around 8:45 pm, just in time to enjoy the second concert and the beer garden.

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