

## Git along, little doggies

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent  
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## Spring, summer rodeo plans are shaping up

After successful pandemic rebounds last year, Gallup's rodeos are gearing up to build on that success with events as big or even bigger this year.

The Eighth Annual Best of the Best Rodeo will be back June 21 to 24. It's a unique family event, an open rodeo for junior high and high school competitors. Last year's event saw 400 contestants, most of them traveling with their families.

"It does bring in some pretty fantastic contestants because our payouts are larger than other events," organizer Walt Eddy said.

Keeping that number steady is a challenge though.

“Every year you lose a fourth of your kids,” Eddy explained. “There’s more seniors that come to something like this than freshmen.”

Contestants compete in nine timed events, including barrel racing, pole bending, breakaway roping, tie-down roping, team roping and steer wrestling, plus goat-tying and breakaway roping events for girls. A highlight of the rodeo is two generational roping events, in which the teen competitors may partner with a parent in competition.

Eddy also hosts open team roping events for adults in May, June and September, but those are smaller.

Returning for its 101<sup>st</sup> year will be the Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial Rodeo, themed “A New Beginning.” The ceremonial will run Aug. 4 to 13 with the full schedule of dances, art shows, parades, performances and rodeo competition. The 100<sup>th</sup> Ceremonial last year brought in 996 rodeo contestants for a week of roping and riding.

“We’re excited not only as our community, but participants from around the country are knocking at the doors, they’re calling every day,” President of the Gallup Inter-tribal Indian Ceremonial Association Kyle Tom said. “We’re keeping things big. We went big last year and we’re just building upon it.”

Tom said some sponsors are already pledging money.

Despite an alleged drunken joyride that terrorized last year’s opening parade, Tom said the Ceremonial went well and drew great crowds,

“In 2014, we saw 3,500 people through the gates. In 2022, we did a record 38,180 attendees,” he said, noting those figures don’t include the morning parade or opening night event. The association wants to keep the momentum going this year.

“It’s on track. They’re calling about how they can get into the night performance and how they can get into the rodeo,” Tom said. “The buzz is already going.”

### ***FUNDRAISING DANCE***

It’s not just the livestock kicking up their heels. The association is hosting a fundraising dance Feb. 11 at Red Rock Park to raise money for this year’s event.

Participants can dance to The Good Old Boys and enjoy hors d’oeuvres, raffles and a cash bar by Rocket Lounge. Tickets are \$25 per person, available in advance from the association office at 285 S. Boardman Ave. Suite A, or at the door.

Fans will remember the band playing before the Old School Day at last year’s rodeo.

“What we’re looking to do is capture the fun and excitement of our opening night wine gala, where people dance. It’s a social event where people come to hang out and catch up,” Tom said.

### ***AN ECONOMIC KICK***

Rodeo season isn’t just a part of Gallup’s annual fun calendar, it’s also a big economic driver. The events bring contestants and audiences from far and wide, who then go home and serve as ambassadors for future years.

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Most of the visitors for Best of the Best are contestants, parents and grandparents who stay at the Red Rock campground, but they have plenty of time to spend in town.

“You see a lot of cowboy hats walking around town that week,” Eddy said. “We have two performances a day: One in the morning that finishes around 11 am and another in the evening, so they have from noon to 5 pm to go downtown.”

Rodeo attendance is free, so there’s no official crowd count for Best of the Best.

The ceremonial rodeo is a big draw every year. Tom, whose day job is announcing rodeos around the Southwest, credits the fact that it’s an open event.

“I firmly believe our rodeo is the biggest open rodeo – meaning we don’t have a governing or sanctioning body so we can make our own rules, our own format and it’s open to anybody and everybody – in the states of New Mexico, Colorado and Arizona,” Tom said.

An estimate drawn from the state economic development department’s economic impact calculator showed the 100<sup>th</sup> ceremonial generated \$12 million of local economic activity.

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