

New process slows selection of Ceremonial board

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
Friday, 08 March 2024 00:00



The ceremonial is still rebounding from two years of sharing control of the event with the state tourism department. Former Ceremonial Director Dudley Byerley, who worked hard to reclaim the Ceremonial's independence, resigned at the beginning of January having accomplished that goal. He said he'll still help from the sidelines as a volunteer but won't have an official role.

Other board members have been serving month-to-month since last year's event to keep the ball rolling, and nonprofit president Kyle Tom is angling for the director job.

The same bill from last year's state legislative session that returned the Ceremonial to local control also gave the McKinley County Commission the power to appoint the director and board members.

Commissioners approved two new board members – Deputy County Manager Brian Money and Finance Director Sara Keeler – at their Feb. 27 meeting. They also heard comments from Tom and a new board applicant, song and dance coordinator J.T Willie.

"We had three that were able to show up," Tom said. "We did explain that the ones that had day jobs weren't able to make it that day."

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He, Joyce Graves and Hilda Bowman had spoken with the panel at a Feb. 20 work session when they were quizzed about their roles. First-timer Dennis Lorenzo has also thrown his hat into the ring.

With multiple candidates unable to attend the daytime meeting, commissioners put the remaining appointments in County Manager Anthony Dimas's hands, noting that the decision needed to be made by the next commission meeting March 19. He said he hopes to have a list sooner.

"It's a big responsibility for the county," Dimas said. "We want to make sure we turn over every rock we can."

The county serves as the fiscal agent for state funding for the Ceremonial, and in most years kicks in between \$25,000 and \$40,000 of its own for operating expenses.

The GITIC board is statutorily required to have nine members, with the director serving in a nonvoting role. The new appointments mean that not all the former members will have board seats. The authorizing bill also requires that a majority of board members be Native American.

The remaining former board members in contention are Daisy Arsenault, Deisha Holyan, Marvin Pete and Francine Thompson, with Willie and Lorenzo seeking first appointments.

"We need to look at this a little bit closer. I want better checks and balances," Dist. 3 Commissioner Robert Baca said after the meeting. "I just want to make sure that the funding that is coming from the state goes where it's supposed to go."

This year's event is scheduled for Aug. 2-11 at Red Rock Park.

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