

Ceremonial officials: Preview Night a success

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 12 August 2016 00:38



Event still one of NM's largest

Throughout the 95th annual Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial's Preview Night at Red Rock Park, residents and event organizers mixed and mingled at one of New Mexico's most renown happenings.

Gallup's Ceremonial is one of the Indian Capital's top draws for tourism.

"Everything is going very well," Dudley Byerley, president of the 2016 Ceremonial, said midway through the event. "There are people here from not only Gallup and McKinley County, but people from all over the state and from parts of Arizona and elsewhere."

Throughout the evening event, Byerley chatted with citizens, business owners, representatives from civic groups, and elected officials from locales as far away as Chinle, Ariz., and Crownpoint.

The Ceremonial exhibit hall, set up with booths that showcased everything from arts and crafts

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to jewelry and rugs, was a place where dozens of folks dropped by to get a glimpse of Native American-made works and more. One booth showcased gift items earmarked for contestants competing in the Ceremonial Queen contest. The booth was manned by 2015-16 Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial Queen Kahlaya McKinney.

"It's going pretty well," McKinney said. "I've talked to people from all over."

Area trader Bill Malone, who oversaw the best-of-show contest, said excitement was definitely in the air. A 14-inch buttery maiden kachina, made by Ronald Honyouti of Hopi, Ariz., took home the prize.

"I think people are enjoying themselves," Malone said. "I've been associated with Ceremonial for almost 35 years."

Later on, a ladies and juniors bull-riding event drew a few hundred people as spectators. The show was among several rodeo and bull-riding events held throughout the weekend.

"My son is just getting into bull riding, so we came out today," Wanda Yazzie, 35, of Window Rock, said. "We actually just moved here from Crow Agency, Mont. We have things like this, but nothing that really takes place during an entire week."

Ben Welch, city community services coordinator, said the evening progressed smoothly, and the wine-tasting went well.

"I saw a lot of people in there," he said. "I've heard nothing but positive things since the evening began."

Byerley introduced some new features to the 2016 Ceremonial, among them a \$10, one-time entry fee, which working families benefit from, he said. The fee allows folks to attend the rodeos or Indian Dances for a single charge.

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“I think it’s a positive in that you’ll most likely see a lot more people actually attending the event,” the Ceremonial president said. “That’s what we want.”

Byerley noted that, although it rained lightly, on and off, the weather didn’t dampen the spirit of the event.

“I really like it,” April Villanueva, 16, of Window Rock, said. “I like the rodeos.”

Gloria Underwood, a former Ceremonial board member said the evening went extremely well.

“We got the word out early about schedules and so forth, so people had time to plan,” she said. “I think everyone’s having a wonderful time.”

The weekend continues with Indian National Finals Rodeo, an open rodeo, and a first-time “Old School Days” rodeo, which honors the rodeos of Ceremonial’s past, Byerley has said.

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