

Ceremonial, council butt heads over marketing plan

Written by By Rick Abasta For the Sun
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The Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial, an annual celebration featuring tribal dances, artwork, and exhibits, stands at odds with the City Council over marketing for the 97-year-old event.

During the April 10 regular meeting of the Gallup City Council, the recommended grant funding from the lodgers' tax, which supports tourism and events, was debated at length.

Tourism and marketing manager Jennifer Lazarz reported on the funding awards to the grantees and offered marketing tips to the programs, naming the Ceremonial one of the recipients.

Councilor Allan Landavazo said the Lodgers' Tax Committee met on Jan. 26 to look at events for the upcoming fiscal year, and that the funding was distributed.

"Are there any concerns on how they are going to market their events?" Landavazo asked at the April 10 meeting.

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Lazarz said that spending \$28,000 for the Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial program, compared to spending \$2,000 to \$3,000 for marketing out of town, was a concern.

She said that distributing the budget in the way it was proposed would mean missing out on tourism markets like senior citizen tour groups, foreign travelers, and others outside the market area.

“The committee provided recommendations,” she said. “We looked at the economic relationship where money is spent in town versus outside of town.”

Landavazo said the Ceremonial is the biggest receiver of money and questioned the rodeo as part of the Ceremonial and the need for efficient use of marketing dollars.

Speaking to the council, Ceremonial director Dudley Byerley reported that the rodeo began with 4,000 attendees in 2015, and grew to 7,500 in 2016 and 12,000 in 2017.

“Our marketing plan is working. Ninety percent of our sponsorship is local. We have a \$600,000 budget. I need to support the people who support us,” Byerley said.

He added that changes, like extending the Ceremonial from three days to 10 days, are paying off, especially considering most of the manpower is from volunteers.

“A good lesson for us is the Gathering of Nations, there’s no rodeo,” Landavazo said, comparing the Ceremonial to the popular tribal meet-up and celebration held in Albuquerque.

Byerley disagreed with Landavazo’s suggestion.

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“Fifty-nine percent of our gate was due to that rodeo,” Byerley said. “There was no loss. Would you like to take my place?”

He encouraged the councilor to step down and volunteer to operate the Ceremonial and see the issues firsthand.

“Do what you want to do,” Byerely said, adding that this would be his last year as head of the Ceremonial. “I’m not that guy anymore.”

The debate continued before Palochak motioned to approve, which was seconded by Councilor Linda Garcia. The council passed 4-0-1, with Councilor Yogash Kumar abstaining.

The other programs did not get the opportunity to report before the council on their lodgers’ tax funding and marketing efforts.

GROWING PAINS

According to the “96th Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial Economic Impact Analysis & Marketing Report,” 12,005 unique visitors attended the event in 2017, which was a 39.4 percent increase over 2016’s 8,609 visitors.

“The Ceremonial has no money,” Byerley said. “We get lodgers’ tax, which is \$50,000. But that usually comes until the week of Ceremonial, portions of it. We have to pay for everything up front.”

He said the limited amount of state funding comes in until October or November.

The City Council wants the Ceremonial marketed outside of the area but Byerley said it’s local

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people that make up the bulk of attendance, whether to the rodeo or the nightly dances.

“In order to make the Ceremonial solvent, I have to put local butts into the seats,” he said. “I have to make our people 150-miles around Gallup happy first because I know they will come and pay the entrance fee. They (the councilors) don’t like that idea.”

The city’s decision to set up two tents downtown for artists, paid for by the lodgers’ tax, is adding insult to injury, Byerley added.

The tents created a direct competition to the Ceremonial operation, which also markets juried competition in various art forms.

“The city, in (its) infinite wisdom, decided to put those tents up. So we take in less money,” Byerley said.

Lazarz said the original intent of lodgers’ tax was to create economic opportunity.

“Tourism is an economic driver,” she said. “It’s one of the largest industries in the state.”

Advertising locally equates to recycling our income, she said, instead of bringing people into the area to grow the economy.

Lazarz has lived in Gallup for about three years and spent the last year-and-a-half implementing changes to the city’s marketing efforts, which she said were mandates from the City Council when her job position was created.

“We are having some growing pains,” she said.

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Rethinking how the city advertises locally will help grow the economy through tourism, including Gallup's premiere event, the Ceremonial.

"Instead of 10 newspaper ads, maybe (do) three...something like that. We're not saying don't spend the money here," Lazarz said.

After 97 years in existence, the Ceremonial should be spending about 20-40 percent over their overall budget on marketing, she added. The event budget is \$600,000.

"They're saying the rodeo is making the money, but they had a free gate on Sunday—there are things like that," Lazarz said. "The numbers are not all adding up and the budget is not making sense to the City Council."

By Rick Abasta

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