

Wild Thing brings the thunder for 30th anniversary

Written by By Cody Begaye Contributing Editor

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Top Diné riders, past champions, new entertainment on tap

“Are you bad enough?”

“The boys are back!”

“Expect the unexpected!”

These words have been plastered on posters seen around Gallup at the start of summer for many years. These posters signal that one of the premier summer events in Gallup and the Four Corners is ready to electrify both residents and visitors once more.

WildThing Championship Bullriding has been bringing the thunder to Red Rock Park every July for over 30 years. Three decades of some of the top bull riders in the country and across the world facing off against some of the best bucking bulls in the country.

Larry Peterson, coordinator for Wild Thing, spoke to the *Sun* June 27 about the landmark occasion.

“It’s crazy to think it’s the 30th [show],” Peterson said. “That’s a long time for an event. It has been about 20 years since Wild Thing became the number one open bullriding in the southwest.”

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SLATE OF EVENTS

On July 7-8, Wild Thing brings its patented selection of entertainment for the whole family. The central draw of Wild Thing is the selection of top riders versus top bulls.

“We have all the top Diné riders coming, [like] Cody Jesus [and] the current Indian National Finals Champion bull rider Robbie Taylor,” Peterson said. “We have three or four past Wild Thing champions returning this year.”

Peterson highlighted other Brazilian riders, some of whom compete in the PBR, as well as riders that come from across the country from Georgia, California, Texas, Oklahoma, to up north from Canada.

In addition to the riders and bulls battling it out in the arena, guests will get to see the fan-favorite Champion Wooly Riders, where six young champion riders who won their spots will now compete for the top prize.

There is the tense game of Cowboy Poker, where the boldest card players around play a few hands while a bull circles the group. The game has garnered international attention due to the battle of wits between each player as well as the bull.

Wild Thing continually brings new entertainers to the show, for which Peterson voiced his enthusiasm.

“We have a brand new funny man, Colt Hart, coming this year. I think everyone will enjoy him. He’ll be real great for the crowd, real high energy,” Peterson said.

Then for its 30th year, sponsor JiffyLube will bring a spectacular fireworks show that is touted as

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being bigger than ever. With the City of Gallup unable to hold their own show this Fourth of July, Peterson said Wild Thing is stepping up with their display.

“Our [fireworks] show is different. It’s really intense and goes up at once and is pretty entertaining,” he said.

A COMMUNITY EFFORT

A show the magnitude of Wild Thing requires many sponsors and supporters to come to fruition, which Peterson emphasized.

“I want everyone to pay attention to who our sponsors are because a big show like this can’t happen without sponsors,” he said. “We want guests to be aware of the [businesses] who help us put the show on and to support them in return.”

Key sponsors listed on the poster include Gallup Propane Service, Navajo Tractor Sales, Laroc Inc., Pinnacle Bank, Rico Auto Complex, Thunderbird Supply Company, Walmart, Castle Furniture, Red Rock Security & Patrol, and many more.

Then, as was reported in last week’s issue, one of Wild Thing’s largest supporters is Manuelito Navajo Children’s Home. The home has become synonymous with Wild Thing for over 25 years as they provide parking and concessions for all guests.

“It’s [the home’s] biggest fundraiser of the year, so we want everyone to come out and give

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them their support as well,” Peterson said.

While the show is able to accommodate many visitors during its two-day run, Peterson highlighted several key details for visitors to remember:

There are no ATMs onsite, and the cellular service is insufficient for most card transactions. Guests are advised to bring cash for parking, concessions, merchandise, etc.

Items such as coolers, folding chairs, and larger bags are not permitted.

Bringing dogs and other pets is not advised. The large crowds and sounds from the show including the fireworks can upset the animals.

Wild Thing always has been and always will be a nonalcoholic show.

GOING STRONG

Peterson said they were fortunate to have Wild Thing be the first major event in the Four Corners after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted in 2021 and to have consistent growth after many years.

“We’re just all so proud that everyone loves going to Wild Thing,” he said. “Even when the

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weather gets a little rough, really good crowds come out. That's a great thing for the Children's Home, for Gallup, for McKinley County to have a big strong event like this."

Tickets go on sale July 1 at Castle Furniture, T&R C-Store, and T&R Feed. Advance tickets for adults run \$25 for July 7 and \$28 for July 8, while child tickets are \$8 for both days. The price at the gate will increase to \$30 for adults and \$10 for children.

For more information on Wild Thing, including full ticket and sponsor information, visit their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/wildthing.bullriding/>.

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