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By RACHEL COLEMAN

• Leader & Times

Casino Night is coming to Liberal, with a Feb. 15 fundraiser at the Liberal Elk's Lodge to benefit the Liberal Air Fair. The event, from 5 to 10 p.m., will feature roulette, slots, craps, Black Jack, Let it Ride, Texas Hold 'Em, an ongoing auction and an all-you-can-eat taco bar. A cash bar will also be open. Organizers will award door prizes donated by local businesses.

"It's going to be a lot of fun," said organizer Jennifer Manell, who selected the fundraiser for its unique options. "We talked about a golf tournament, a Texas Hold 'Em fundraiser — but this was something different."

Tickets for the Casino Night are priced at \$30 per person, \$50 per couple. Upon arrival, each person will receive \$2,000 worth of "Fun Money," which can be used for the meal (\$1,000 of "Fun Money") or the array of just-for-fun gambling games. "Fun Money" will also be used to bid on auction items contributed by local and area businesses.

Manell listed a Snowfire Ski vacation package, a PS4, an Apple iPad, a necklace, a Coach purse, a flat screen television, and Air Fair specials — a skydiving package, helicopter rides, VIP seating and access.

“We’re still gathering donations,” she added. Would-be bidders need not be expert poker players. “You can cash out chips for more ‘Fun Money,’ or you can just buy more if you want to bid on the prizes,” Mansell said.



Unlike real-life gambling, which carries the potential for lost money, the Casino Night fundraiser is a win-win. All money raised flows back to the community, to finance the 2014 Liberal Air Fair.

Though organizers are reluctant to release details about this year’s Sept. 13 Air Fair line-up, the show in 2012 featured stunt pilots, free plane rides for kids, helicopter rides, tandem skydiving and the usual family-friendly festival favorites — bouncy houses, food vendors and more. The Air Fair drew more than 8,000 visitors to Liberal, from 40 ZIP code locations.

Manell’s focus on the casino fundraiser flows from her passion for aviation and Liberal’s bi-annual celebration of it.

“The whole goal of this fundraiser is to provide an Air Fair that’s free admission,” she said. “It’s good for the community, good for people who don’t get to see aviation every day. This is one way to keep aviation alive.”

Manell knows what she is talking about. The daughter of Jim Lyddon, owner of Lyddon Aero Center, Manell is now part owner of the family business.

“I practically grew up in the airport,” she said. “It was so much fun.” Now a parent, Manell loves seeing her daughter Elizabeth enjoy the same airport adventures she relished as a child.

“She gets to hang out with her Poppa, to go on trips,” Manell said. “I did that all the time when I was a kid.”

One of Manell’s favorite memories centers on a trip to Las Vegas.

“It was my 12th birthday, and I begged my dad to take me with him,” she said. “He let me go along, and I even got to play slots, until they kicked me out. It was the best birthday ever.”

The Air Fair fundraiser is limited to ages 21 and older, Manell said with a chuckle. Even though participation is restricted to adults, “it’s all about the kids,” she said. “It’s about bringing a love of aviation to the next generation.”

Tickets for the Air Fair Casino Fundraiser are available at the Leader & Times office, 16 S. Kansas Ave., phone 626-0840, and Lyddon Aero Center, 757 Terminal Ave., phone 624-1646. Or, call 629-7076. The Casino Night will be from 5 to 10 p.m. Feb. 15 (a Saturday) at the Elks Lodge, 2010 S. Holly Drive.

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