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Saddle bronc riding action like this will be at the PRCA rodeo Friday and Saturday nights at the fairgrounds rodeo arena in Liberal. Photos courtesy PRCA

By ROBERT PIERCE

- Leader & Times

A group of leaders in the Liberal community recently organized the Rodeo Group LLC in hopes of getting a PRCA rodeo in Seward County.

Now, that hope has become reality as the rodeo arena at the county's fairground facility will play home to Liberal's first PRCA rodeo this weekend.

It may be the first event of its kind that Liberal has hosted, but members of the Rodeo Group say it is by no means their first. The members have put “both feet in,” and are going “no holds barred” for creating, promoting and engendering a dynamic rodeo culture in Liberal.



“Entertainment and income,” said C.J. Wettstein, one of the organizers of the rodeo, in a press release from the Rodeo Group. “It’s what’s in it for Liberal, Kansas. It will make the retailers money, it will fill up the hotels, it will make the restaurants money, it will make the gas stations money, so it’s entertainment and income.”

Wettstein was initially approached by Timberline Productions about having a PRCA rodeo in Liberal. He then decided to put some “legs to his prayers” for a rodeo in Liberal and to contact people in the community about getting the rodeo going.

The first person Wettstein talked to was Renee Haralson to see if she would be interested in investing in a PRCA rodeo. Wettstein and Haralson next formed the group and began looking for investors, and finally had a plan in place.

The plan was later taken to Liberal’s tourism board, and Charlie Delay and Trish Campbell volunteered to help with ideas and promotions. From there, the race was on to find investors needed to put on the rodeo, and not long after that, investors were found, making the rest history.

“We’d like to utilize our fairgrounds more, utilize nice facilities Liberal already has,” Wettstein said.

Haralson and Campbell spoke to the Leader & Times Friday about the upcoming rodeo, and Haralson said the event will feature many of the common categories, such as bareback, saddle bronc, bull riding, tie down roping, steer wrestling, team roping and barrel racing.

“They’re two separate rodeos,” she said. “We’ll have champions at the end of Friday and champions at the end of Saturday. They can stay and actually gain points two separate days.”

Campbell said there will also be slack performances each night of the rodeo.

“There’s actually going to be two rodeos each night with some events,” she said.

Rodeo fans will also have a chance to meet some of the performers prior to the start of the Friday night fun.



“Thursday, out at Walmart from 5 to 7, they’re going to have a meet and greet and sign autographs,” Haralson said. “The announcer will be there, and the barrel man will also be out there. They can sign autographs. They can visit. We’ll be giving away some tickets, and we’ll be giving away T-shirts. Poppa D Clown from our local area will be out there also.”

Cash giveaways will take place throughout the rodeo, and there will be a kids boot scramble too, giving young people something fun to do as well.

Haralson said the members of Rodeo Group actually put up the more than \$50,000 it took to put on the PRCA rodeo. Both she and Campbell would like businesses and sponsors to benefit from Liberal's rodeo.

"We go to Guymon's rodeo every year, and we love it," Haralson said in the press release about the PRCA rodeo that Oklahoma community hosts every year during its Pioneer Days celebration. "I've got grandkids doing Little Britches rodeos, so we're just inundated with rodeo contestants in this area. It just makes sense."

Campbell agreed, saying sponsors need to be paid back for the help they have given in getting the PRCA rodeo to Liberal.

"We have lots of area sponsors, businesses that have put up money and helped out," she said. "The town's been great in the short time we had to put it together for supporting and helping us out."

Haralson emphasized the rodeo will be an annual event in Seward County.

"After this year, we're going to do it every year, and it'll be the third weekend of August every year," she said.

Plans for the rodeo began taking place just a couple of months ago, but despite the short time Rodeo Group has had to work with, Haralson said everything is coming together and taking shape to make this weekend possible.

"It was short, quick, but we're hoping that everybody will come out and support it," she said.

The event has its own Facebook page at Seward County PRCA Rodeo, and Campbell said many people have already been posting supportive comments.

“I look forward to it,” she said.

Delay has been a part of all of the process, and he said there are lots of rodeo fans and contestants in and around Liberal.

“As the rodeo builds, entertainment builds,” he said in the press release. “You don’t see people that have been holding rodeos just having rodeos. They’re having concerts and craft shows and more. You may not see it the first year, but it’s going to build and build and just be its own big thing.”

Delay knows people that win \$250,000 roping at the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas.

“We could help them get started right here, if we can get started,” he said. “If we could bring in a World Series Team Roping, we could bring in lots of people.”

Advance tickets for the rodeo are available at the Crazy House and Chrysler Corner in Liberal.

“They save \$2 on the adult tickets if they buy it prior to the gate,” Haralson said. “Tickets are \$15 for adults. From 6-10, it’s \$8, and 5 and under is free.”

The rodeo starts at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday nights in the rodeo arena at the Seward County Fairgrounds. For more information, contact Wettstein at 629-1342 or Haralson at 629-3393, or e-mail info@sewardcountypcarodeo.com.

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