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Guymon Pioneer Days Rodeo

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Guymon Pioneer Days Rodeo shows set for April 30-May 2

GUYMON, Okla. – When the Guymon Pioneer Days Rodeo kicks off in April, some wonder if the dates have changed for the annual event.

“We’re actually back to the real tradition,” said Jim Quimby, chairman of the volunteer rodeo committee that produces the event. “When Pioneer Days started in the early 1930s, the Depression was going on and our Founding Fathers were looking for a way to get people to celebrate the community.

“Back in 1890, the Organic Act was enacted on May 1, so No Man’s Land became part of the Oklahoma Territory. So in the 1930s, the Founding Fathers decided to tie Pioneer Days to the Organic Act.”

Over time, the tradition became to have Pioneer Days on the first weekend of May, which has been the case for a number of years. With all the festivities – the mercantile, the carnival, the parade, the barbecue, the Old Timers Breakfast, the rodeo, etc. – it became more than a May 1 celebration.

“The original May 1 was on a Saturday, just like this year, so we really are back to what it was like,” Quimby said.

The confusion has come because of the weeklong rodeo festivities at Henry C. Hitch Pioneer Arena, where competition begins April 26 with a day of barrel racing.

“Pioneer Days has turned into a reunion time for a lot of families,” Quimby said. “I’ve already received a number of calls and messages about our dates, because people are trying to make their plans to be here.

“A lot of people consider Friday to be the start of the weekend, but Saturday and Sunday is the weekend, and this year May 1 and May 2 is the first weekend. If Saturday was April 30, then we’d wait until the following week.”

But that’s not happening, so the bulk of the rodeo festivities will take place in April. Team ropers, tie-down ropers and steer wrestlers will compete in two full go-rounds on Tuesday, April 27, and Wednesday, April 28. Steer ropers will compete all day Thursday, April 29, and Friday, April 30, with the first paid performance following at 7:30 p.m. Friday.

Other performances will take place at 2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, May 1, and 2 p.m. Sunday, May 2, and the rodeo will feature nearly 1,000 contestants and nearly every cowboy and cowgirl who competed at the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas this past December.

“I think last year we had about 850 contestants, which was down a little,” Quimby said.

But he expects those numbers to be up a little in 2010.

“For us, we’re just really excited to bring back muleys in team roping,” Quimby said of the long-time tradition of teams roping hornless steers at Hitch Arena.

For the past two years, the Guymon rodeo has been forced to have horned cattle in team roping, which is the way it is at most events that are part of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association.

“The thing that always set Guymon apart was the fact that we roped muleys,” Quimby said.

“Because we were roping horned cattle, our team roping numbers dropped. These pro ropers, if you talk to everybody, they will talk about the muley roping in Guymon.

“The muleys are back, and everybody’s excited about it. Over the years, you could see how the cowboys adapted to it. It’s amazing how their speed and time has increased over the years. It’s a fun deal, and it’s unique for us. We’re glad it’s back.”

There are a lot of reasons for Quimby and the rest of the volunteer committee to be excited about the rodeo. It provides the biggest single-event economic impact, not only for Guymon, but for Texas County. Cowboys and cowgirls from all over North America not only come to compete in the Oklahoma Panhandle, but many stay for most of the week.

Then there are the fans that flock to town for the high-flying action. They know a good thing when they see it, whether they come from Clayton, N.M., or Pampa, Texas, or Syracuse, Kan.

“There are a lot of people who have called this an NFR-caliber rodeo in May, and we’re proud of that,” Quimby said. “I think it’s going to be another exciting rodeo.”