

Stampede springs into action

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

Year to year, there are very few changes made to the Elgin Stampede, and what changes do take place are done to improve the event and the rodeo grounds.

It's a method that is clearly working.

The Stampede enters its 72nd year this week coming off a first, as it was named 2017 Columbia River Circuit Small Rodeo of the Year last year.

"It's a big deal," said Ty Hallgarth, who is in his second year as rodeo president. "It's the first time we've ever won it. When we went to the Columbia River Circuit meeting in Yakima they did nothing but brag about it. A lot of cowboys (who participated) bragged about us. They all were really tickled for us. They're the ones that pushed for us, too."

Hallgarth said the pace of the rodeo has always been a plus for the Stampede.

"I think the thing that makes our rodeo unique is it happens really fast. (Other rodeos) have a lot going on and they seem to drag out, in my opinion," he said. "What makes ours better is it happens fast and it leaves people wanting more at the end of the day."

But Hallgarth and the rodeo board have not been resting on their laurels.

"We're trying to make something happen every year to make (the Stampede) better instead of doing the same thing every year," Hallgarth said.

In recent years, those improvements have been in construction on the grounds. That included the construction of a new secretary's office last year, and a new VIP room ahead of this year's event. The grandstands were rebuilt in recent years as well.

The new pieces help, but Secretary Lara Moore said the entire product is what



Ronald Bond/Observer file photo

Redmond's Jory Markiss was the champion of the Mark Nichols Memorial Bull Riding at the 2017 Elgin Stampede.

led to the Columbia River Circuit accolade.

"I think (the secretary's office) was only one part of why we won the award. The overall rodeo, contestant numbers, arena footing, etc., are all factors," she said in an email.

One major change last year was the decision by the Stampede board to co-sanction and allow riders who aren't in the Columbia River Circuit to take part.

The purpose was simple: "Get more cowboys here so the show is a better show," Hallgarth said.

It resulted in an increase in riders a year ago, and Hallgarth believes the same will happen this year.

In fact, if projections hold, the Mark Nichols Memorial Bull Riding, the main event Thursday night, could have one of its highest — if not the highest — number of riders ever. Moore said there are 33 bull riders, and the pot that night is more than \$14,000.

"We are expecting very



Ronald Bond/Observer file photo

Winnemucca, Nevada's Trenten Montero is shown during the Elgin Stampede last year. The 72nd edition runs Wednesday through Saturday.

strong numbers," she said.

The action kicks off, as it does annually, with free admission for tonight's Family Night beginning at 6 p.m. Thursday is the Mark Nichols Memorial Bull Riding, and Friday is the

opening of two nights of Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association competition. The three final nights begin at 7 p.m. and tickets cost \$16 for adults and \$11 for children. Moore said she anticipates roughly 5,000 spectators to

take in the rodeo.

It may just now be getting major notoriety, but the rodeo president said he's always felt the Stampede was among the best around.

Now, there is ground to back that claim up.

Close to 40 professionals to play in Grande Ronde Open II, which expands to two courses

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

After a successful opening run in 2017, the second edition of the area's main disc golf tournament, Grande Ronde Open II, is primed to be an even bigger hit.

Nearly 100 individuals, including almost 40 professionals, are registered for the event, which takes place Saturday and Sunday.

Tournament Director Alex Duffy believes even more people could sign up before the action kicks off.

"I have another dozen people I'm expecting to show up," he said Monday.

The main addition to last year's tournament is a second course at Morgan Lake. Like last year, participants will play at the 18-hole course at Eastern Oregon University on Sunday, but the tourney will open Saturday at a course at Morgan Lake.

"The Morgan Lake course is a temporary course right now," Duffy said. "If it was permanent, it would be the third longest in the state of Oregon. It's a true professional level course, which is nice."

The challenge of the



Ronald Bond/Observer file photo

Zoe Andyke, shown in last year's inaugural Grande Ronde Open, is among nearly 40 professional disc golfers scheduled to take part in Grande Ronde Open II this weekend.

Morgan Lake course, Duffy said, will help offset the low-scoring EOU course.

Duffy said on the EOU course, "It's do or die if you're not getting birdies."

He said the Morgan Lake course "will be this very technical, long course where shooting around par isn't a bad thing"

The course at Morgan Lake is a blend of holes previously laid out by Trent Bray of Bobolink and a first-time set-up by Duffy and the Grande Ronde Open team. Duffy said he's been working with La Grande Parks and Recreation Director Stu Spence on the preparations for Saturday's play at the lake.

"This is a test to see how this course will do," Duffy said. "The biggest concern is how it will interact with everything else. Hopefully everything goes well (and) we can develop it into a permanent course."

The EOU course will be a very similar layout to a year ago, with the exception of a

couple of holes that have been readjusted due to current construction on campus. Eventually, there will be some permanent alterations to the course, especially when construction on the new field-house begins.

Duffy said the field in this year's tournament includes athletes who are household names within the disc golf world. Among them are Andrew Nava, Luis Nava, Dustin Keegan, and La Grande native Zoe Andyke.

"(The) Nava brothers are top 25 in the world," Duffy said. "Within disc golf (these are) big names."

Avie Durrant, a local youth disc golf standout, is also competing again this year.

Andyke, Durrant and Keegan will be leading a disc golf clinic Saturday night at EOU that is free and open to the public.

For more information, visit discgolfszene.com and type Grande Ronde Open II in the search bar.

Online registration is closed, but those still interested in signing up can do so by messaging Duffy on discgolfszene.com by Thursday night.

Thai soccer team is out of cave

By Kaweewit Kaewjinda
and Stephen Wright
The Associated Press

A daring rescue mission in the treacherous confines of a flooded cave in northern Thailand has saved all 12 boys and their soccer coach who were trapped deep within the labyrinth, ending a grueling 18-day ordeal that claimed the life of an experienced diver and riveted people around the world.

Thailand's Navy SEALs, who were central to the rescue effort, said on their Facebook page that the remaining four boys and their 25-year-old coach were all brought out safely by early Tuesday evening. Several hours later, a medic and three SEAL divers who had stayed for days with the boys in their tiny refuge in the cave also came out.

Eight of the boys were rescued by a team of Thai and international divers on Sunday and Monday.

"We are not sure if this is a miracle, a science, or what. All the thirteen Wild Boars are now out of the cave," the SEALs said, referring to the name of the boys' soccer team. "Everyone is safe."

Cheers erupted at a local government office where dozens of volunteers and journalists were awaiting news of whether the intricate and high-risk rescue mission had succeeded. Helicopters transporting the boys roared overhead. People on the street cheered and clapped when ambulances ferrying them on the last leg of their journey from the cave arrived at a hospital in Chiang Rai city.

Amporn Sriwichai, an aunt of the rescued coach, Ekkapol Chantawong, said she was happy and excited. "If I see him, I just want to hug him and tell him that I missed him very much," she said.

Payap Maiming, who helped provide food and necessities to rescue workers and journalists, said a "miracle" had happened.

"I'm happy for Thais all over the country," he said. "And actually just everyone in the world because every news channel has presented this story and this is what we have been waiting for."

"It's really a miracle," Payap said. "It's hope and faith that has brought us this success."

The plight of the boys and their coach has captivated not only Thailand, but much of the world — from the heart-sinking news that they were missing, to the first flickering video of the huddle of anxious yet smiling boys when they were found 10 days later by a pair of British divers. They were trapped in the Tham Luang cave on June 23, when they were exploring it after a soccer practice and it became flooded by monsoon rains.

Each of the boys, ages 11 to 16 and with no diving experience, was guided out by a pair of divers in three days of intricate and high-stakes operations. The route, in some places just a crawl space, had oxygen canisters positioned at regular intervals to refresh each team's air supply.