

Hells Canyon Motorcycle Rally canceled for 3rd straight year

Organizer plans to return in 2023; Baker County chamber director says other major summer events scheduled for 2022

By JAYSON JACOBY
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — For the third straight summer one of Baker City's signature events, the Hells Canyon Motorcycle Rally, will not happen.

Mark Dukes, a partner in High Desert Harley-Davidson of Meridian, Idaho, the dealership that organizes the rally, said that multiple factors contributed to his decision to cancel the event.

And unlike the cancellations in 2021 and 2020, the pandemic isn't the lone issue.

Two other concerns this year, Dukes said, are a major construction project to build more than 300 wheelchair-accessible curb cuts, including on Baker City's Main Street, a focal point for the rally, and a shortage of employees at his motorcycle dealership.

Dukes said he doesn't have enough workers to both organize the rally in Baker City and operate the dealership.

"I don't want to go up there and not have a great rally," he said.

Although the omicron wave of COVID-19 has passed, and infection rates

are plummeting, Dukes said there is still an element of uncertainty that matters with an event such as the rally, which takes at least six months to plan.

Dukes said the prospect of partnering with other organizations to coordinate the rally isn't feasible in his view, because they would need to be familiar with motorcycles and the motorcycle industry.

Dukes said his goal is to revive the rally in 2023.

Shelly Cutler, executive director of the Baker County Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center, said that although she's disappointed that the rally is canceled again, she's optimistic that it will return in 2023.

"It's a hit to our summer tourism for sure," Cutler said. "It's an incredible event that brings a lot of revenue to the county and businesses. I do not expect another summer to go by without the rally."

She said she understands Dukes' concerns.

Cutler also points out that even without the rally, the roads that brought the event to Baker County more than 15 years remain an attraction for riders, and she expects many motorcyclists



The Hells Canyon Motorcycle Rally, one of Baker City's major summer events, won't happen in 2022, the third straight year it's been canceled. The organizer hopes to resume the event in 2023.

will visit the county this spring and summer.

That happened last summer despite the rally being canceled, she said.

"They still come to Baker, just not in the masses that we would see with the official rally," Cutler said.

Busy summer ahead

Also on the positive side of the ledger, Cutler said all other major summer events in the county are slated to happen as usual, including the Baker City Cycling Classic in June, Miners Jubilee and the Bronc and Bull Riding competition in July, the Shrine All-Star Football Game and Baker

County Fair in August and the Sumpter flea markets during Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends.

Moreover, an event that also was canceled in 2020 and 2021 — the Baker City Memory Cruise car show — is back on the schedule for Aug. 20 in Geiser-Pollman Park.

A new event planned for the weekend of May 20 is the Chautauqua Americana Music Festival in Richland. The event will include a variety of live music at the Eagle Valley Grange Community Park, as well as artisans selling handcrafted items and specialty foods.

"I think we still have

a lot of good things going on," Cutler said.

Ready for influx of visitors

Cutler is optimistic that the 2022 spring and summer tourist season will be a busy one in Baker County, as people from across the nation, as well as foreign travelers, take advantage of the waning pandemic.

That was the case during spring break 2021, she said.

"Last spring break was the busiest traffic I've seen in the six, almost seven, years I've been here," Cutler said. "People were so ready to get out, and I expect that trend to con-

tinue, as people are feeling safer."

Among travelers visiting the county this winter, Cutler said about 40% were from the East Coast.

"People are still taking road trips," she said.

Cutler said very few people who call the Chamber's Visitor Center ask about mask or vaccine mandates. But she's still pleased that Oregon's indoor mask mandate will end no later than March 31, according to Oregon Gov. Kate Brown.

The Oregon Health & Science University this week forecast that the number of COVID-19 patients in hospitals would drop below the 400-person threshold for ending the mask mandate by March 20.

"We always impress upon people who call that Baker County is open for business and we're excited to have them back," Cutler said. "I think we're all excited to get back to normal."

Staffing challenges

Cutler said that although some restaurants and other businesses continue to struggle to find enough employees to maintain their usual schedule, she believes the situation is improving.

She thinks the tourist season and its influx of customers could be a great opportunity for high school students, including this year's graduates, to earn money for college.

Jackalope Jamboree expands to three days

Music festival grows in its third year at Happy Canyon Arena

By TAMMY MALGESINI
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — In just its third year of existence, Jackalope Jamboree is gearing up for a three-day country and Americana music festival at the Happy Canyon Arena in Pendleton.

The event features headliners each night. Reckless Kelly will kick things off Thursday, June 23, Turnpike Troubadours will travel to the stage Friday, June 24, and closing out the event on Saturday, June 25, is Mike & The Moonpies.

FOR TICKETS

Online: Visit www.jackalopejamboree.com

Nearly 20 musical acts will take the stage during the festival.

According to Chad Colwell, one of the event's organizers, if early ticket sales are any indication, this could be the best year yet.

Landing Turnpike Troubadours, he said, "is kind of a big draw for us." In less than a month, Colwell said they have more than doubled tickets sales as compared to all of last year.

Running on adrenaline from a successful inaugural event in 2019, Colwell and fellow organizers Rian Beach and Daren Lequerica announced in early 2020

plans to expand to two days for the second year.

And then the global pandemic pulled the plug, forcing the trio to wait until 2021 for their sophomore event. Even with lingering restrictions and the sweltering heat, Colwell said more than 1,000 attended on the festival's first day and a tick below that showed up for Saturday's performances.

Colwell said early out of the chute, the idea was to move beyond a one-day event.

"We wanted to see this thing grow," he said. "It was a goal at some point to expand and get bigger."

However, they didn't have to re-create the wheel in order to jump from one day to multiple days, Colwell said. A number of music festivals, he said,

have created a sort of template for that, including the Braun Brothers Reunion (Challis, Idaho) and Hwy 30 Music Fest (Filer, Idaho).

Contributing factors to Jackalope Jamboree's quick success, Colwell said, have been a supportive community, solid sponsorship and Travel Pendleton's promotional efforts.

Another big draw, he said, is mixing up the lineup.

In addition to national touring and traveling acts, Colwell said it's important to include local musicians or those with ties to the region — that includes such talent as James Dean Kindle, Elwood and Tylor & the Train Robbers.

"Pendleton and Eastern Oregon has a tremendous



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Concertgoers dance as Jesse Daniel performs June 26, 2021, during Jackalope Jamboree at the Happy Canyon Arena, Pendleton. The country singer-songwriter returns for the 2022 musical festival, which is slated for June 23-25.

music scene," he said. "There's a lot of great music and we want to showcase them."

While two- and three-day packages have been on sale for nearly a month, single-day ticket options are available starting Monday, Feb. 21.

For a link to ticket

information, visit www.jackalopejamboree.com.

Also, with RV/trailer camping already selling out, organizers are trying to secure another location.

Colwell encouraged people to keep an eye on the event website and social media pages for updates.

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