

Big bucks

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Changes to Pony Express Rodeo make event a major draw for spectators, competitors

This isn't your granddad's rodeo.

The annual Pony Express Rodeo at the Gothenburg arena on July 3 and 4 will have so many new features that local followers may not recognize it.

Except for the wholesome family fun, that is.

Gothenburg Roping and Riding Club president Jared Slagle said big changes are in store that spectators and competitors should both appreciate.

"We're looking forward to a couple of really good shows," Slagle said.

To begin with, the total prize money for each rodeo event has more than doubled over the past two years to allow the Pony Express Rodeo to offer one of the largest purse possibilities of amateur rodeos in the state and even the Midwest.

Slagle said this year will offer \$1,000 in added money for each event.

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“That means we are able to attract higher caliber contestants and more contestants,” Slagle said. “With more money available to the top finishers, people are willing to drive farther to participate.”

The Pony Express Rodeo is an approved rodeo in three circuits: the Mid-States Rodeo Association, the Nebraska State Rodeo Association and the Kansas Professional Rodeo Association.

Slagle said most of the 250 or so contestants come from Nebraska but eight or nine states will be represented from Montana to Texas.

The stock contractor this year is J&J Rodeo Company of Lakin, KS.

In addition to increasing the purse, the roping club is also bringing in top-notch entertainment.

Caine “The Pain” Hager of Henderson, CO, has grown from his roots in bull riding into a professional rodeo entertainer.

He clowns around a lot, doing shows at major events including the Mountain State Circuit Finals, PRCA and PBR rodeos nationwide.

“He has worked some of the largest rodeos in the world,” Slagle said.

Hager will perform both nights of the rodeo.

Two entirely new aspects of the Pony Express Rodeo include a concert following the July 3

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performance and a beer garden hosted by the After-Dark Rotary Club on both nights.

Joel Warren, who is scheduled to compete in the steer wrestling event, is a Nashville recording artist who will present a concert at the arena following the rodeo on that Tuesday night.

Warren is originally from Stapleton but now calls Austin, TX, home. He has written and recorded two albums, including his 2011 release, "Straight Up Country."

Warren's style is rooted in traditional country music, with plenty of influence from artists such as George Strait, Garth Brooks, Chris LeDoux, Mark Chesnutt and even Elvis Presley.

The concert is free.

The beer garden, Slagle said, is a fund raiser for the newly formed After-Dark Rotary Club.

Beer will be served at the arena from 6 p.m. to 1 a.m. both nights.

With all the new attractions, old favorites return to the arena as well.

The roping club will have mutton bustin' during the rodeo each night, limited to the first 15 contestants who sign-up at 6:30 p.m. prior to each rodeo performance.

There will also be a calf scramble each night, along with pony rides and kids games to benefit the Relay For Life.

The Pony Express Rodeo wouldn't be possible, Slagle said, without the donations and

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sponsorships by individuals and businesses in Gothenburg and the surrounding area.

“The analogy of the cream always rising to the top seems to be a perfect description of the community of Gothenburg,” he said. “When it comes to having pride and being the best in community affairs, building for the future and sustaining a wonderful place to live, our community has always been a step above. It’s is no different with the Pony Express Rodeo. We want to be the best with the best rodeo entertainers, contestants and rodeo stock. We want to create an environment over the Independence Day holiday that is second to none and becomes a must-attend event every year. This couldn’t be done without the help of our great sponsors and volunteers.”