

By ROBERT PIERCE

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There is a possibility of a PRCA rodeo coming to town within the next three months, but officials with the Seward County Five State Fair are looking for ways to help fund the event.

“We have a chance to have a PRCA pro rodeo brought in,” said fair board president Jennifer Malin at Monday’s county commission meeting. “We met with Sharon Mowery out of Colorado, and she presented to us a two-day event.”



Malin said Mowery initially called the Liberal Chamber of Commerce, and through that call, she got the number of county commissioner C.J. Wettstein, who said he got a call from Mowery.

Wettstein said in order to put on a two-day PRCA rodeo in Liberal, prize money and all, the price tag would be around \$50,000 to \$55,000.

“They came early and looked at the arena,” he said. “We keep talking about wanting to have things that draw people into town. Jennifer went back, and she talked to the fair board.”

Malin said the fair board was asking the commission for \$25,000 of the cost.

“I talked to Sharon today, and she said we could get \$20,000 in sponsorships,” Malin said. “She has national sponsorships.”

Wettstein said \$20,000 in sponsorships would still leave funding a bit short, but he believes with the capacity seating at the rodeo arena at the fairgrounds, that money could be easily raised.

“We have a little over 1,100 seating capacity right now,” he said. “If we could fill the stands, tickets would run about \$15. If we could fill the stands, we’d raise the \$30,000. At best, we’re probably going to be looking at a break even point. There’s a possibility we’d have to come up with \$5,000 to \$10,000.”

Wettstein noted, however, that is limited seating, but Malin said she was informed fairground officials could bring in portable bleachers. Other seating could be available as well to increase that capacity.

“We would also allow people to bring in lawn chairs to sit in the open areas,” she said. “We were banking on 2,000 people in the seats.”



Wettstein said Seward County could eventually own its own PRCA rodeo.

“Dodge City owns their PRCA rodeo,” he said. “Guymon owns theirs. Once you set up a date, you would actually own that date. You’d own a Seward County PRCA rodeo.”

Wettstein said the event would be a great one to have, and he is willing to take the chance to find out.

The rodeo would take place July 24 and 25, making the actual start of the fair on the date the event starts.

“We’ve got something scheduled on Friday, but it’s not set in stone,” Malin said. “The money that we’ve allotted for that deal is \$10,000, so we could use that as our \$10,000 to the PRCA.”

Wettstein said he knows the risk being taken to get a PRCA rodeo in Liberal.

“If we’re going to try to start working on things for people to come to, I know \$55,000 is a bunch of money, but you’ve got to start somewhere,” he said. “I would like to try it.”

Malin said she did not need an answer immediately, but with the fair less than three months away, something will need to be done soon.

“I just wanted to bring it to you to think about it, and if you have any questions, call me,” she said. “We have to get our application in and get those date sets when nothing else is going on”

Malin said the \$10,000 that was initially earmarked for one of the fair’s original opening events would then be used as an installment payment for the rodeo, and \$20,000 would come from sponsorships.

“That is local and national,” she said.

County administrator April Warden said there are corporate sponsorships available from companies like Wrangler, Copenhagen, Dodge and Coors.

Wettstein said he realizes getting a rodeo to Liberal is a gamble, and the only question needed to be answered is if the event gains enough money to justify having it.

“It’s a big enough event that we ought to have a lot of people come in from out of town,” he said.

Wettstein said he believes the rodeo could come with a three-year contract, and he said what happens in terms of success is clearly up in the air.

“We may break even,” he said. “We may make a little. We may lose a little. I would like for us to be thinking that we would at least do it for three years and see what we could build it up to at the end of three years.”

Should the county decide to fund a portion of the rodeo, Warden said there is money in the reserves budget for special projects.

While he was not against the rodeo itself, commissioner Jim Rice said he felt using county money was not the right route to go to fund it.

“I don’t think we have any business using taxpayer money to fund a rodeo,” he said. “That’s just my opinion. The word ‘gamble’ was mentioned. I don’t particular care for that word. When you think of taxpayer money and gamble in the same sentence, I think we’re setting ourselves up for a big time fall. I just can’t support that. I’m not opposed to the rodeo at all. I think it’d be a good event, but I think you need to find a better way, a different way to fund that other than using county taxpayer money to do it. We’ve got a lot of businesses in town that would benefit from that, and as far as I’m concerned, that’s where you need to go. I can’t support that.”

