

Press Release

2023 Valley Center Stampede Rodeo & Memorial Festival Cancelled

Valley Center, CA, February 24, 2023: It is with heavy hearts and tremendous disappointment that we announce the cancellation of the 2023 Valley Center Stampede Rodeo & Memorial Festival, scheduled for this Memorial Day Weekend at Star Valley Park in Valley Center, California. This is not a decision we have taken lightly only three months prior to our rodeo, especially given the hundreds of volunteer hours and financial commitments (amounting to thousands of dollars in losses) towards the 20th Valley Center Stampede Rodeo.

The cancellation is a result of circumstances beyond our control. On February 3, 2023, the County of San Diego Department of Parks & Recreation radically changed the Star Valley Park Use Agreement they had originally presented us with on August 27, 2022. District Manager, Jake Enriquez, contacted Valley Center Stampede Rodeo President, Billy Wagner, to inform him of a recent County policy change that radically altered the park's previous rental fee structure, resulting in an estimated 385% rate increase and terms that our Board of Directors deemed impossible to meet. Despite repeated requests by Billy Wagner for the new fee structure and reporting guidelines, and examples of equivalent Use Agreements with similar organizations, no such information was provided; nor was any example of such found on the County's website.

Instead of the original per-acre rental rate offered by the County for undeveloped park land at Star Valley Park, the County was now requiring us to pay a "fee of 5% of gross revenues from [the] event (including ticket sales, parking fees, merchandise, food and beverage sales, etc.)." Further, and most egregious for us, was the County's new requirement for our organization to be responsible for the collection and pass-through of 5% of the gross revenues from each of our vendors.

Given the "30 days past the event date" deadline to submit the 5% of gross revenue, our exhausted volunteers would now be required to go to each vendor while they were breaking down their setups at 11:00 pm on Saturday night to request proof of their event sales and collect 5% of their gross revenues. Not only would this place us in a very uncomfortable position with our vendors, but it would also create an undue burden on our volunteers with zero benefit to our organization. Billy Wagner specifically expressed concern about reporting discrepancies and asked Jake Enriquez who would be responsible for any vendor fees that the County believed to be insufficiently reported. He was informed that the County would audit the vendor's 5% of gross revenue submissions and any shortfalls found would be incurred by our organization.

Our President, Billy Wagner, spoke with several individuals at Supervisor Jim Desmond's office to discuss the new policy change and share the threat it was imposing on this year's rodeo and festival. He was assured that they would investigate the matter. Shortly after those interactions, Billy Wagner was contacted by the County of San Diego Department of Parks & Recreation District Manager, Jake Enriquez, informing him that the original contract terms from August 2022 would be honored; however, he stressed that starting in 2024 we would have to comply with the new 5% of gross revenue park use fee policy. Billy Wagner's understanding from that conversation was that the original contract terms would be honored; however, the new contract (received one hour prior to our emergency board meeting on February 21, 2023) included several new terms and conditions that imposed significant increases to our budget and burdens on our committee members that our Board found impossible to comply with given the late notice of the changes; thus, our Board of Directors voted unanimously to reject the County's newly revised Star Valley Park Use Agreement..

Valley Center Stampede Rodeo, Inc. is a nonprofit corporation organized and operated exclusively for charitable purposes, specifically to preserve our town's western heritage and to honor our military service members through the annual, Valley Center Stampede Rodeo & Memorial Festival. We have been bringing the sport of rodeo to Valley Center every year since 2002. While COVID-19 restrictions cancelled the rodeo in 2020 & 2021, the 2022 Valley Center Stampede Rodeo & Memorial Festival was an epic success with record community attendance and corporate sponsorships. We were awed and humbled by the turnout by our community in the form of volunteers and attendees. Additionally, we received high praise from the County personnel assigned to attend both days of the event for our success with high community attendance, crowd control, emergency preparedness, traffic management, and safety. We were specifically told that they wished all of their County events we operated as professionally as our event.

As we have grown and expanded over the years, we now have the monumental task of recruiting over 200 volunteers and raising over \$200,000 to make the Valley Center Stampede Rodeo possible at an affordable rate for our community, as well as providing a free Memorial Festival to honor our nation's service members. Under our previous land-use agreement, our community could be assured that the money they spent on tickets, parking, beer, advertising, and sponsorships would be used exclusively to operate the rodeo, support youth and military programs, and advocate for a permanent equestrian facility in Valley Center. These new requirements would revoke that assurance, sending a sizeable amount of the revenue generated from our local event to a pool of money to be used for county-wide projects, many of which would have no benefit to the residents of our own community.

We are 100% volunteer operated with no paid positions in our organization. We have many professionals that donate their time, experience, and equipment to raise a professional rodeo out of a dusty field every year. With no permanent home, we have relied primarily on the generous allowance of private landowners for our rodeo grounds until 2018 when the Valley Center Parks & Recreation Department offered us a 5-year contract at Star Valley Park. This agreement was mutually beneficial as it provided us with a steady location and helped Parks & Rec get the word out about their newly acquired Star Valley Park. In 2021, the County of San Diego took over control of Valley Center Parks & Recreation and, as such, we were subject to new contractual terms. The County honored the terms of our original agreement with Valley Center Parks & Rec for the 2022 Valley Center Stampede Rodeo & Memorial Festival. In August of 2022 we were sent the contract for our 2023 event with a new rate that we believed to be fair, and we moved forward with planning our event at Star Valley Park.

We strongly believe that our nonprofit organization is an asset to the County of San Diego Department of Parks & Recreation with all revenues generated (above the event startup capital needed) being reinvested back into our community via high school senior scholarships, military morale welfare & recreation donations, and improvements to the park. Our unique event attracts thousands of residents from San Diego County to an undeveloped park with no amenities (no bathrooms, no parking lots, electricity or water) and showcases a park that many would not be aware of if not for the Valley Center Stampede Rodeo & Memorial Festival. We have been caught completely off guard by the County's last minute policy changes to the Star Valley Park Use Agreement. As such, we will begin immediately to search for a new home to host the 2024 Valley Center Stampede Rodeo & Memorial Festival. We have proven our resilience and our community has faithfully supported our endeavors, so we are confident that the rodeo will return to Valley Center.

We are fully aware of the enormous disappointment that will be felt not only by our supportive community, but also by our loyal sponsors, faithful volunteers, trusted vendors, and the committee members that work year-round to make this amazing event possible. Please check our website (www.VCStampede.com) and Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/valleycenterstampede) for updates and information about the 2024 Valley Center Stampede Rodeo & Memorial Festival.

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