

Campbell County Rec Center preps for thousands of guests during Camporee

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1 of 5



Lifeguard Alex Pearson watches over the lap pool Thursday at the Campbell County Recreation Center in Gillette. Next summer the facility will see a massive influx of visitors as the International Pathfinder Camporee rolls into town.

Ed Glazar

When the International Pathfinder Camporee comes to town in August 2024, the Campbell County Recreation Center will be a big part of the event's off-site activities.

Camporee is expected to bring more than 50,000 people to Gillette and thousands of kids will be using the Rec Center. The staff has worked to strike a balance between being a good host and still allowing residents to use the facility.

Thursday afternoon, more than 27,000 tickets had been sold for the event, which will be in Gillette Aug. 5-11, 2024. Camporee will be using parts of the Rec Center from Aug. 6-9, and it will be paying for the use of the space, as well as some of the staffing costs.

Residents who like to lift weights or use the cardio machines will still be able to do so without much disruption, said Recreation Superintendent Adam Gibson. But if they like to swim, climb or play basketball, they might have to adjust their schedules for the week.

Camporee will be paying \$350 a day for the use of the field house and the gym. That is what the Rec Center currently charges for someone to rent the field house, Gibson said. The Rec Center also is charging Camporee \$25 per hour per lifeguard, and \$18 an hour per belayer at the climbing tower.

Combined, Camporee will pay more than \$10,000 to use the Rec Center that week, Gibson said.

"We're not just giving it away," he said. "It is going to affect the patrons."

During the summer, the Rec Center is open 17 hours a day Monday through Thursday, and 16 hours on Friday.

During Aug. 6-9, 2024, the Rec Center will be open for 67 hours, and Camporee will be in the Rec Center for 26 hours, or 39% of the time. It won't be using the entire Rec Center, and portions of the facility will remain open to the public the entire time, Gibson said.

From 1-4:30 p.m. on Aug. 6, 2024, as well as 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Aug. 7-9, Camporee will use the gym, two racquetball courts, the field house, lap pool, leisure pool and climbing wall. During those hours, the areas will be closed to the public.

From 5 a.m. to 1 p.m. Aug. 6-9, locals will be able to use the areas, as well as from 4:30-10 p.m. Aug. 6-8 and 4:30-9 p.m. Aug. 9.

The whole second floor of the Rec Center will remain open to the public the entire time, as will the weight room and the locker rooms.

The Pathfinders will be transported around town by bus. The buses will pull into the designated bus drop-off area that is used during high school sporting events, and Pathfinders will go in and out of the Rec Center through the field house entrance. They will be using the team locker rooms.

Camporee will have a volunteer at the bottom of the stairs to make sure no Pathfinders go upstairs, Gibson said.

Additionally, Camporee will be limited in how many people it can bring to the Rec Center at once.

“They can’t have more than a thousand people here at the Rec Center at one time,” Gibson said.

The Rec Center has had more than 1,500 people in the field house for a track meet, Gibson said, so this won’t be an unprecedented number of people for the facility.

“It’s not a thousand people coming through our front doors,” Gibson said. “It’s not like it’s going to be shoulder to shoulder packed in here.”

While the Rec Center staff want to give Camporee a good experience, they can’t forget the people who use the building all year long, Gibson said.

“It’s cool for all those people to see what we have here in Gillette, we just want to be good hosts, accept them, make sure they have a good experience, but we also have to make sure we’re taking care of our patrons,” he said.

While the department expects to be in good shape when it comes to full-time employees, it has its eye on solving an annual issue with seasonal employees.

Each May, the parks department gets hundreds of seasonal employees, many of whom are high school or college students. They work as lifeguards, they take care of parks and they’re also out at Bell Nob.

But every year in the first part of August, many of these employees quit so they can prepare to go back to school.

Dwayne Dillinger, executive director of Parks and Rec, said he’s talked with county commissioners about different ways to incentivize seasonal employees to stay on through later in August.

“We’ve had it every year for the last 20 years,” Dillinger said. “Kids get tired at the end of the summer.”

It’s particularly an issue when it comes to lifeguards, he said. New hires have to go through training, so they can’t start lifeguarding right away.

“When lifeguards bolt, that sometimes leave us in a bind,” he said.

“That puts us in an ordeal to try to cover those required shifts that we need to have to be able to safely guard the pool,” Gibson said.

The Rec Center has been able to find ways to deal with this issue in the past, but with it expected to be magnified during Camporee, they’re hoping to remedy it soon.

“We’ll spend the next couple months, maybe come up with a system for bonuses for seasonal employees that stay on through a certain date,” Dillinger said.

“We’re just floating ideas out there, how we can keep kids through the middle or end of August, to cover those shifts,” Gibson said.

The contract with Camporee has been signed, so regardless of what happens with seasonal staffing, the Rec Center will have to pull off hosting the thousands of kids.

“We’ll do it, we always do, but our job is to make sure it happens, and treat our employees fairly, and hopefully give them an incentive to stick around through Camporee, next year, and the following years,” Gibson said.

Jonathan Gallardo