

Nugget's rib cook-off runs for six days

By: Albert C. Pacciorini
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The Nugget rib cook-off, one of the largest outdoor barbecue events in North America, will draw about a half-million people starting next week during its six-day run.

The festival “started in 1989 as a weekend event with a handful of cooks, most of whom we had to literally plead with to come,” said Michael Traum, publicist for John Ascuaga’s Nugget, which established the big barbecue.

“With a solid stable of cooks and sponsors, along with building a great relationship with the city of Sparks, the event steadily grew to where we now run six days, always ending on the Monday of Labor Day,” he said.

Beth Cooney, executive director of marketing at John Ascuaga’s Nugget, said, “The Nugget Rib Cook-off has grown over the years into one of the most fun and exciting events for guests from literally all over the world. Last year we again encountered capacity crowds.”

The Nugget opened as a 60-seat coffee shop with a few slot machines in 1955. John Ascuaga bought it in 1960, growing it into a full-service resort, with two 29-story hotel towers, casino, entertainment, food, and conference and spa operations.

In the day, Ascuaga would play poker with the stars from the TV show “Bonanza,” including Lorne Greene, Michael Landon and Dan Blocker.

Last year, the Nugget completed a \$20 million remodel of its east tower hotel rooms, adding flat-screen TVs and iPod docking stations and renovating its popular buffet.

A \$1 million renovation of its conference center should be complete and open next week.

“Convention guests are more discerning than ever, and this project addresses their needs and expectations,” said Michonne Ascuaga, the company’s chief executive officer. The Nugget has made a niche in convention business for decades. Of its many restaurants, the most popular include the Oyster Bar, buffet and Trader Dick’s.

The rib festival runs from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Wednesday through Sept. 7. (It closes 5 p.m. Sept. 7.)

Besides the cooking contest, more than 40 bands are scheduled to play on five stages.

San Jose’s Joey Chestnut, winner of a number of food-eating contests, is expected to compete in the rib-eating contest at 6 p.m. Wednesday. Chestnut has won the contest three times, winning by eating 9.8 pounds of rib meat last year.

Tips: Check the Web site for maps with parking areas. A good bet is to park at one of two nearby high schools



Here’s the meat: One of the country’s biggest barbecues will take place next week in front of the Nugget’s twin towers; the popular resort is in Sparks, Nev. (Courtesy photo)

and take a free shuttle that runs every half-hour. “If you want to avoid crowds,” Traum said, “try coming during lunch on any of the days.”

IF YOU GO

21st Best in the West Nugget Rib Cook-off

When: Wednesday through Sept. 7

Where: Victorian Square in front of the Nugget

What: Outdoor barbecue, entertainment, vendors

Web: www.nuggetribcookoff.com

Admission: Free

Notes: 100 tons of ribs served in 2008; cook-off; rib-eating contest; huge kids area

John Ascuaga’s Nugget Casino Resort

Where: 1100 Nugget Ave., Sparks, Nev.

Phone: (800) 648-1177

Web: www.janugget.com

Hotel rooms: 1,600

Slots: 1,300

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