

CLAREMORE (OK) — The Will Rogers Wild West International Expo is returning to Claremore in 2007 — where a world record big loop was twirled this year.

Wild West Arts Club, headquartered in Las Vegas, Nev., home of the convention 16 years before moving to Claremore in 2005, and the Will Rogers Memorial Commission, announced the 2007 international convention and competition dates April 19, 20 and 21 at Claremore Expo Center.

“Return of this event, important to preservation and promotion of western arena arts, is made possible by a partnership with the city of Claremore,” said Michelle Lefebvre-Carter, Will Rogers Museums executive director.

“The WWAC is proud to announce it has been invited back to Claremore for the third year,” said Mark Allen, WWAC international director. “The Will Rogers Memorial, city of Claremore and people of Claremore have made WWAC participants feel very welcome each year. We see this as a long term relationship.”

“While other venues have sought the rights to host this annual ‘finals’ event that caps regional competition in trick roping and riding, whip cracking, gun spinning, fast draw, knife and tomahawk throwing and mounting shooting, membership strongly favors a third year in Claremore. The hometown of Will Rogers, facilities and hard work of the Will Rogers Memorial Commission and museum staff, the hospitality and graciousness of citizens, the superb Expo facilities, fine media coverage and stipend from the city of Claremore are strong factors in favoring Claremore.”

Knife Thrower Joe Darrah raved about his Claremore experience. “I have traveled all over this country, driven 47 states and I’m here to tell you the WWAC and Claremore are a match rarely seen or experienced and a part of that is due to the passion and pride...” in what they are doing.

“We are happy to welcome them back,” said Ned Callison, speaking for the “gentlemen from the Green Onion,” who helped sponsor a welcome party at the Oologah Will Rogers birthplace ranch.

“This event provides a forum for young people to learn about Will Rogers and western arena arts,” said Lefebvre-Carter. “Our mission is to keep alive the memory of Will Rogers and the heritage of the American West involving young people in events.”

She expects to expand on the growing program involving school children. This year thousands of school children from northeast Oklahoma visited the Expo with part of the center set aside for children’s demonstrations and hand-on lessons.

In addition to WWAC members taking their skills to area schools, many of the schools combine field trips to the Expo with visits to the Will Rogers Museum in Claremore and birthplace ranch in Oologah.

The Will Rogers Memorial Commission has been involved with WWAC many years. Funds left to Will Rogers Heritage Inc. by the late Frank Dean, a world champion rope spinner, are used for a Frank Dean-Will Rogers Award presented each year at the convention and competition.

WWAC has a membership of more than 600 from 10 countries.

During the 2006 event, Charlie Keys of Wisconsin twirled a 107 feet, two-inch loop, qualifying him for consideration for Guinness World Records. Documentation has been submitted to the London-based publication.

Participants from 29 states and five foreign countries this year filled area motels and brought business to restaurants and the retail community.

All events are open to the public as spectators.