

# Folsom fills up for 'Western Night Under the Stars'

By **TIM KELLER**  
*The Chronicle-News*

The addition of a chili cook-off and a concert by cowboy singer Steve Cormier did the trick: attendance at the Folsom Museum's annual Western Night Under the Stars Saturday smashed all previous attendance records. With people arriving from all around a hundred-mile radius, the population of Folsom - 75 - was, for a few hours, nearly tripled.

The influx began soon after archaeologist Chuck Hannaford set up his tables in front of the old Doherty Mercantile Building in early afternoon. The project director for the New Mexico Office of Archaeological Studies in Santa Fe, Hannaford displayed artifacts from throughout the area and its various eras of history, including early Native Americans, homesteaders, and ranchers. People brought their own objects, too, curious to discuss them with Hannaford and, in many cases, find out what they were or how they were used.

Hannaford logged 120 people that stopped by to visit with him over his tables.

Even as chili cooks began dispensing free samples to everyone, Fred Balmer of Folsom Falls Ranch began serving up



Photos by Tim Keller

Western singer Steve Cormier entertained outdoors until the rains came.

huge plates of his "Texas Longhorn Meal" -- sliced beef and ham, beans, posole, cole slaw, and cake -- offered in exchange for a ticket bought with a suggested donation to the

museum of \$10. Despite the number of people filling up on free chili samples, the museum sold 69 of Balmer's dinner plates.

In its first foray into chili cook-offs, the event drew

grounds, observers could tell it was a heated contest.

Emerging with a clipboard, Kelly Hill wiped sweat from her forehead. Hot chili? "No, stress," she reported. "There was one clear winner, but we had a lot of discussion over the others, and much re-tasting. Finally, we averaged our scores rather than have more discussion."

Winning Category 1, Red Chile, was Trinidad's Joe Weaver with his "Road Kill Tex-Mex Chili", which he revealed contained five pounds of beef and two pounds of pork, along with pinto beans, not allowed in some chili cook-offs but at Folsom, anything goes.

Winning Category 2, Tex-Mex Chili, was Trinidad's Jim Colt of Colt Ranch, who described his entry as "a true Texas chili, a cattle drive chili" made with beef, elk, and bison -- but no beans. To accompa-

the horsemen happened to be camped outside town Saturday evening. They enjoyed Hannaford's presentation and some great western food, sitting on hay bales while listening to Cormier's songs of the old west.

As Cormier set up on a flatbed trailer stage, clouds moved in from the west and put everyone in shade. While the crowd finished up their dinners and Cormier began his fourth song, the sky opened and the rains came, hard and long. Cormier moved his show over to the old Folsom schoolhouse, while volunteers helped pack and clean up the museum grounds. Noting a donation bucket full of dollar bills, left out in the rain, someone referred to it as money laundering.

The only part of the event that was rained out was the biggest moneymaker for the museum, the



Archaeologist Chuck Hannaford spent the afternoon and evening discussing local objects and artifacts with visitors.



Folsom's Hunter Schoonover helped set up the "bleachers" -- rows of hay bales borrowed from neighbor Dino Cornay's shed.

five entries in three categories. As the cooks ladled pint samples for the judges, each sample was assigned a random number: 25, 36, 47, 58, and 65. The judges were Marsha Hyde of Raton and Kelly and Sonny Hill of Folsom's Rainbow Ranch. Although they sequestered themselves in a garden far across the museum

ny his dark concoction, Colt offered bowls of garnishes--grated cheeses, flame-roasted ancho chiles, jalapeños, chopped onions...and pinto beans.

Folsom's own Abbie Reaves won the Grand Prize along with Category 3, Green Chile, for her pork-based entry, made during the day with repeated

annual auction of arts and crafts items donated by local artisans. The auction has been rescheduled to the museum's next big event, the grand opening ceremonies August 7 for an exhibition mounted by the Smithsonian Institution, "New Harmonies, Roots of American Music". That event will run all day, from

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**Publisher:**  
Aileen Hood, ext. 5  
aileen@trinidadchroniclenews.com

**Director of Creative Services:**  
Sheila Hamlin, ext. 6  
sheila@trinidadchroniclenews.com

**Reporter:**  
David Santistevan Jr., ext. 3  
david@trinidadchroniclenews.com

**Classified Advertising Office Manager:**  
Noah Simpson, ext. 4  
noah@trinidadchroniclenews.com

**Business Manager:**  
Barry Hood, ext. 8  
barry@trinidadchroniclenews.com

**Reporter:**  
Richard Sitts, ext. 7  
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Trinidad's Joe Weaver won "Best Red Chile"

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instructions over the phone from her daughter, Jane Reaves, who was in Colorado Springs.

Among the crowd enjoying the event were three British horsemen following the historic Goodnight-Loving Trail from Fort Belknap, Texas, to Denver and points beyond. The westernmost of the western cattle trails passed right through Folsom, and

10 to 5, with live music and other festivities.

Even without the auction proceeds, Saturday night's Western Night Under the Stars was counted by organizers as a huge success. And even as they scampered to their cars in the rain, it looked like most participants would have agreed that a good time was had by all.