

Gore, 3709 Westerfeld Drive NE, Albuquerque, NM 87111. Phone: 505-292-7457. Email: info@riograndefestivals.com. Website: www.riograndefestivals.com. Application fee: \$30. Space fee: \$495 to \$950. Space size: 10x10, 10x15, and 10x20. 100% indoor. Exhibitors: 200. Admission: \$7 or pass.

**By David Schneider**

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Medium: Photography

The 17th Annual Rio Grande Arts & Crafts Festival Holiday show was, as always, a solid show. The last of the three Albuquerque Rio Grande shows, this show is on Thanksgiving weekend, which turns out to be a fantastic weekend for an art show.

Held at Expo New Mexico (the State Fairgrounds), this indoor show is centrally located in Albuquerque, N.M., and runs on Black Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Set-up is a comfortable two days – Wednesday and Thursday (Thanksgiving Day), making it one of the nicer load-ins you will encounter.

Load-in, thanks to wide aisles and plenty of parking and doorways, is about as easy as it gets, and you can pull your vehicle close to where your booth is and then take the time you need to make it just right. The show advertises itself as a holiday show, and you are encouraged to add some holiday decorations to your booth.

The show's layout provides easy

flow for the patrons. The booths are thoughtfully arranged, the aisles are wide, and there is plenty of sitting areas in the middle of the show for patrons to take a break and listen to some live local music. The sitting areas are in the middle of the show, ensuring that the patrons will continue to see artists. The music is a nice touch, since it prevents silence and gives the show quite a bit of life.

The selected artists are well-chosen. Several times I heard a patron comment that it was an excellent show, and twice they said it was the best show they had ever seen – high praise from regular customers!

Overall, the artist quality is very good and well-balanced. No one category, such as photography or jewelry, was overloaded and for the most part, each artist occupied their particular niche. Further, the layout made sure that no similar artists were right next to each other.

The attendance at the Rio Grande shows is always good. The show does an exceptional job of advertising and they get the word out. They have an active email list which they use and they utilize door prizes to keep it current and fresh. They advertise in the papers and on billboards, and they even make sure the local news anchors tell people to come out to the show in the mornings.

There is a \$7 per-day charge for entry, and \$5 parking. But, \$1 off coupons are readily available. Even better, you can purchase a year-long

pass that lets you into all days of all shows, plus you get free parking. If that's not enough, toward the end of the day you can upgrade your daily pass into a multi-day pass for just a couple bucks. The upshot of this is that although it is a paid admission, patrons end up freely coming and going. That, in turn, means that you have a good chance of your "be-back" actually coming back. They can and they will.

This year the weather was good. The air was a bit chilly, and despite high winds in the forecast, the days were breezy at best – perfect weather for an art show. Attendance on Friday was robust and steady overall, and even at 1 p.m. there was a line waiting to come in. Saturday's crowd was also strong, but tailed off a bit by the end of the day. Sunday's attendance was good, but also tailed off by the end of the day.

As for sales this year, it was more of a mixed bag than usual. The overall mood of the show was average. Some artists did exceptionally well, and a couple even exceeded their sales from the two-weekend Balloon Fiesta from last month. A few artists did exceptionally well and were beyond pleased with their sales. Unfortunately, there were some artists who genuinely struggled.

There isn't a single category that did well or poorly. As some examples, one potter had a slow show while another had a slightly above-average show. One photographer had an average show, another struggled, and yet another had their best holiday show ever. On the positive side, a metal artist ran so low on inventory that they had to have more air-freighted in for the next day, but on the downside, a potter didn't make expenses.

Some patrons shop at this show for their holiday gifts, and lower-priced items tend to do well. However, other patrons are looking to decorate their homes, and are willing to spend substantially higher amounts, providing a nice balance.



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