

Rib 'experiment' has grown to be 'Best in the West'

By Mel Shields, Sacramento Bee

The growth of John Ascuaga's Best in the West Nugget Rib Cook-Off over its 23 years has been nothing short of phenomenal.

While other special events nationwide have gone begging for attendees in a sad economy, this one is expected to grow even more this year. The fact that it takes place Labor Day weekend, one of the busiest periods in Northern Nevada tourism, doesn't hurt, but the fact that it has a reputation for being well-run and providing a great atmosphere for families doesn't hurt either. It's remained remarkably blemish-free.

Last year, visitors to the Reno cook-off managed to polish off 200,000 pounds of ribs. There were a half million people in attendance. This year, the Nugget has ordered 280,000 pounds for the 24 competing cooks, all vying for a piece of the \$14,000 cash purse. If that seems a bit small when compared with other competitions, remember that bragging rights are the big prize. The cook-off is usually cited as the country's most prestigious.

The cooker with the target on its forehead is last year's winner, Bone Daddy's BBQ of Midland, Mich. Bone Daddy's feat last year was more impressive because it also won the People's Choice Award.

New competitors are rare in the competition, and there's always a waiting list. This year has allowed for one – Uncle Bub's out of Westmont, Ill., one of the most popular destinations in the Chicago area.

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