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With 'Bama, Bikes & BBQ, Fayetteville Braces for Multimillion-dollar Boost

By Worth Sparkman - 9/24/2010 2:55:20 PM

Fayetteville hoteliers, restaurateurs and merchants are expecting a shot in the economic arm over the next 10 days.

The much-ballyhooed matchup between No. 10-ranked Arkansas and No. 1-ranked Alabama is set for Saturday and attendees for the 11th annual Bikes, Blues & BBQ rally will begin arriving as early as Tuesday.

"We are expecting our best weekend yet," said Travis Feltner, about game weekend.

Feltner is the co-owner of Feltner Bros. restaurant in Fayetteville's Dickson Street entertainment district. He and his brothers have stocked up on 250 pounds of hamburger patties and 16 cases of french fries. Every inch of cold and dry storage is stocked, he said.

Open just less than a year, Feltner Bros. missed last year's Bike, Blues & BBQ business, but Feltner said he understands from other restaurant owners to expect about as much business as any other week, albeit with out-of-towners rather than locals.

Allyson Twiggs Dyer, director of the Fayetteville Visitors Bureau, wouldn't speculate on what the week might mean for the city. There's no way to tell how many people will come from out of town for either event, she said.

The Alabama game is sold out. Donald W. Reynolds Razorback Stadium has capacity for 72,000, but many will be students and residents. BBB organizers estimated 400,000 people attended the 2009 rally, though the number is somewhat squishy since there is no registration and attendance is derived through various formulas, including aerial photography and measuring the amount of garbage hauled away.

The Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Arkansas did two economic impact studies in 2004: one for BBB, which ran Sept. 29 through Oct. 3, and the other for a Razorbacks game against Georgia on Oct. 23.

The CBER estimated an economic impact of BBB -- with 200,000 attendees -- to be \$38.31 million. Three hundred sixty-one attendees surveyed said on average they would spend about \$297 per person during the trip to Fayetteville.

For the Georgia game, the estimated economic impact was \$25.44 million with an average spend of \$379 per person.

The state's 2009 published economic multiplier is \$235 per person, per trip.

No one can say for sure how many people are expect to hit town for either event, but Twiggs said many of Fayetteville's 26 hotel properties are booked for both events, as well as campground and RV sites for BBB. The city has 2,128 hotel rooms, she said.

T.J. Angeleno, general manager of the Courtyard by Marriott in north Fayetteville, said that as of mid-day Thursday the hotel had about eight of its 114 rooms available for the game and 20 still open for BBB. He expected to fill those quickly.

Leah Hendricks, director of sales for the TownplaceSuites, which is technically in Springdale but is generally accepted to be in Johnson, said all 92 suites have been booked for both weekends for almost two months. The hotel is about six miles from the stadium and Dickson Street.

"It's phenomenal," Twiggs said of the season, BBB in particular. "It's the week every year when I look down Dickson Street and say 'This is tourism at its finest.'

"I know it's loud and bikes are everywhere, but that sounds like money to me," she said.

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