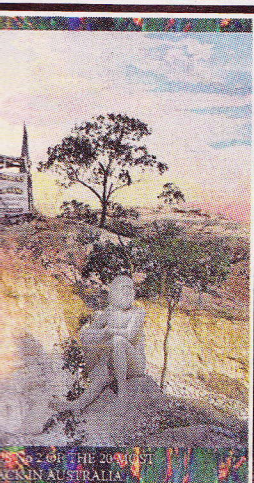




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There will be more than 120 stalls inside and outdoors at the Lightning Ridge and District Bowling Club during the annual Opal and Gem Expo.

Opal expo blockbuster

Feature compiled by
MARK GRIGGS

IT'S going to be a blockbuster mid-year event – the 2013 four-day and night Lightning Ridge Opal Festival, the annual Opal and Gem Expo and the Opal Jewellery Design Awards Competition will be held at the Lightning Ridge Bowling Club from July 25 through to July 28.

It's the festival where jewellers, buyers, miners, rock hounds, lapidary enthusiasts and the ever-important district visitors experience the best Lightning Ridge has to offer when it comes to opal and jewellery information, spectacular jewellery, collectables, great deals and wonderful networking opportunities.

Organisers say the Opal and Gem Expo boasts more than 120 stalls with some 160 exhibitors displaying product ranging from gemstones, tools, lapidary supplies and lifestyle products.

Event manager Angela Myers said the festival begins with a stallholders' wine and cheese night at the bowling club

on Wednesday evening after everybody had set up their stalls.

"We have the bowling club beer garden and outdoor area full of stalls, which spill out along the street as well," she said.

"It's a big four days of fun for locals and visitors."

Ms Myers said the festival attracts more than 4000 visitors and from all reports, a few more plan to attend this year.

As an added attraction Paul Kirk, the Snake Man, will feature his reptilian friends on Saturday.

The Opal and Gem Festival stalls and displays are open from 9am each day, and entry is free.

The International Opal Jewellery Design Awards Association will also hold an opal trade show which opens at 10am daily, and entry is via a gold coin donation.

Ms Myers said Friday evening at the bowling club would feature a big band, known as the Brilliant Band, playing until late.

Saturday evening is the main event,

featuring from 8pm the 2013 Opal Queen Ball with the theme "fire and ice".

Female Lightning Ridge residents aged 18 years and over are eligible to enter the Opal Queen contest, judged that evening.

Ms Myers said there was \$10,000 in prizes to be won.

"Plus there's the opportunity to act as the opal industry's ambassador at the Australian Opal Exhibition on the Gold Coast, and the Women in Racing event in Canberra," she said.

Additionally, there will be a Miss Popularity contest where the audience votes on the night for their favourite contender.

"The winner receives a spectacular piece of opal jewellery and will also nominate her charity of choice which will receive a donation of \$500," Ms Myers said.

Entry forms are available from the Lightning Ridge and District Bowling Club and need to be lodged before Tuesday, July 23.

■ For more information, contact Angela Myers on 0407 455 413.



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