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THE SUNDAY EAST VALLEY TRIBUNE | SEPTEMBER 10, 2017

Controversy follows wrestling troupe to Chandler street fest

BY JIM WALSH

Tribune Staff Writer

An event organizer had no idea it was being offensive, or creating a controversy, when it advertised a performance by a Texas touring troupe called Extreme Midget Wrestling as part of the upcoming Rockin' Taco Street Fest in downtown Chandler.

The troupe's name earned the Sept. 16 event the wrong kind of notoriety when the Phoenix Chapter of the Little People of America wrote a letter of protest to Warren White, Chandler's Americans With Disabilities Act coordinator, saying it considers midget a derogatory term and asked that word be dropped from all advertising promoting the event.

The letter also objected to the nature of the wrestling event, saying it stereotypes and demeans little people – also known medically as dwarfs, who suffer from genetic disorders – turning them into a spectacle. The little people are generally about 2 feet, 8 inches to 4 feet, 8 inches tall.

"As officers of the Little People of America organization at local, district and national levels, we condemn the use of the 'M word,' as it is denigrating, dehumanizing and humiliating to little people everywhere," the letter said.

"We are committed to stop the use of the 'M word' wherever possible, and to raise awareness to prevent events that objectify, humiliate and denigrate Little People."

The event organizer, HDE Agency of Phoenix, decided to drop the M-word from all advertising and promotional material after the city notified the Downtown Chandler Association, the event's sponsor, that it had received a complaint.

"We understand there are terms that can be offensive and we don't want to be insensitive to that," said Matt Burdick, a city spokesman.

Although Chandler issued a permit for the event, the sponsor and organizer are ultimately responsible for the types of entertainment offered, he said.

Jen Pruett, a spokeswoman for HDE, said her company had no idea that it would offend anybody by repeating the troupe's name in advertising. She said the troupe was a substitute for another wrestling show that was popular last year but unavailable this year.

"We have been promoting it like it's a band that is performing," Pruett said. "We didn't mean to offend anyone with the wording."

"We're not jerks, we get it. We are doing everything we can to correct it," she said.

SATURDAY - SEPTEMBER 16, 2017 | SHOW TIME 4:30 P.M.

178 E COMMONWEALTH AVE, CHANDLER, AZ 85225

A food, music and cultural celebration, Rockin' Taco will feature creative tacos including fish, shrimp, chicken, carnitas, carne asada, veggie and more from two dozen local restaurants. Wash it all down with fresh fruit fresca, Mexican cerveza, tequila tasting, margaritas and more. Plus, save room for elote, churros and palettas!

For more information go to : www.rockintacoaz.com

(Extreme Midget Wrestling)

The Phoenix Chapter of the Little People of America is protesting the Extreme Midget Wrestling show at the Rockin' Taco Street Fest, saying it's derogatory.

Pruett said her company has already paid the wrestling group in advance and has decided not to cancel the performance.

A contact person for Center Stage Entertainment, which operates the troupe, gave a brief statement before he disconnected a telephone call from a reporter.

"There's no controversy. We're just people trying to do a job," the company spokesman said, adding that the little people who work as touring wrestlers are not on welfare and that the shows are fun and entertaining.

The troupe's website said they also are

performing in Page and Globe during their tour of Arizona. The wrestlers have provocative names, such as "Baby Jesus" and "Red Neck Brawler."

Edward Myers, president of the Valley of the Sun chapter of Little People of America, said he was pleased to see the M-word dropped from the advertising, even if he still considers the event distasteful.

"I see it as a derogatory term. It offends me," Myers said. "I've found it creates an environment that is very hostile."

– Reach Jim Walsh at 480-898-5639 or at jwalsh@timespublications.com.