



Attendance was up at November’s Saline Craft Show.
Photo courtesy of Ben Goodman, Saline Area Schools

of 250 juried crafters teamed with the school district to display and sell their wares. “Advance publicity on social media was successful, and customers were excited to be in attendance,” she said.

With attendance up, sales were exceptional, and many crafters left with limited inventory, Hoeft said. “Many indicated they arrived with more than adequate inventory but never expected the numbers we had for the period of time of this one-day show. Food crafters especially did very well, as I believe these are great gifts, plus specialties for the holiday,” she said.

Those involved with the show believe in making tweaks when necessary — after thinking it through. “Do not change just for the sake of change, and be sure all aspects are covered,” Hoeft said. “We moved a door and it thus exposed storage to customers. We then purchased curtains.”

Something learned that will improve future shows is fresh cleanup crews facilitate a quick, organized return of the school being ready for teaching on Monday, she said.

“Early and continuous social media is a must. We sought out some special customers to help spread the word and rewarded them with early passes to assist in promoting our postings,” Hoeft said. “We continued weekly customer contests on the media for free passes. Our promotional campaign also included billboards, postcard mailings, radio interviews, and distribution of flyers to all crafters for distribution. We also made two physical changes with the facility — moving an entry and storage.”

That combined effort provided safety and comfort for the customers. “The point here is that even though you may have always done it ‘this way,’ tweaking a procedure should not be avoided, but be sure to think of all ramifications,” she said.

The best improvement made others might learn from was continuing to promote the show after the doors opened. She said they also re-evaluated how guests are managed and in November, provided two customer service booths to address guests’ concerns.

“It may be everything from providing compassion for a lost individual to giving directions to a local restaurant. But it shows your continued interest in who is attending the show. Also emphasizing to your artisans that their professional tending of

customers is important,” Hoeft said. “This is a team effort, and marketing your show as a professionally managed show with talented and dedicated individuals displaying and selling their wares is vital to the future of your event.”

Her message to those considering this show is, “We are a team. We provide the facility and promote the show, but each artisan is present to display their wares and sell them to the customers. Each part of this equation is important to the success of the show and contributes positivity and professionalism. Excitement and enthusiasm for a show exhibited to others involves and leads to true success.”

New Mexico

► **October 6-15, 2023; Rio Grande Arts & Crafts Festival: Balloon Fiesta Show, Albuquerque, NM.** Contact: Rio Grande Arts and Crafts Festivals, Ruth Gore, Colorado Springs, CO 80919; Phone: 505-292-7457; Email: info@riograndefestivals.com; Website: riograndefestivals.com; Application fee: \$35; Space fees: \$759 to \$2,900; Space sizes: 15x5 to 20x10; 90% indoors / 10% outdoors; Exhibitors: 200; Attendance estimate: 19,000; Admission: \$13.

Compiled from *FastAudit* reviews

FastAudit Scores

(1=lowest; 10=highest)

Sales	8.7
Quality of Work	9.1
Balance of Mediums	9.0
Prestige of Show	9.2
Attendance	8.5
Weather	8.1
Advertising	9.5
Management	9.8
Artist Treatment	9.8
Artist Amenities	9.0
Judging and Awards	9.1
Layout	9.5
Load-In/-Out	9.3
Parking	9.5

Rio Grande Arts & Crafts Festival: Balloon Fiesta Show ranked FA36 in 2023’s *200 Best* list. Of the artists who reviewed 2023’s festival, 97% said they would exhibit in this show again.

One jewelry artist reported \$32,200 in sales and would return, saying the show is well-run, advertising is fabulous, security is great, and attendance is outstanding.

A mixed media artist who made \$14,700 said, “This is by far my most favorite and profitable show. I have a growing collector base in Albuquerque, and I look forward to creating art for this show every year. It is superbly organized, and the promoters and staff really care about the artists.” The artist said Ruth Gore and Liz King, along with their staff, work hard to put on a fantastic show. “They are open to feedback and truly care about the success of each artist at the show,” the artist said.

A jewelry artist whose sales totaled \$95,000 said, “It is the best show that I do each year. No other show comes close sales-wise. The promoters are outstanding to work with.”

Sales totaled \$9,800 for an artist whose medium was painting. This artist would return, saying it was a “beautiful venue and great experience with the Balloon Festival going on during the same week.” The artist noted it was a pricey week with the “city on overload during all the festivities.”

An artist whose mediums are fine art and metal made \$8,200 and described the festival as an excellent, well-run, and well-attended show. “Seeing the mass balloon launch each morning is a fun bonus!” said the artist who commented on the high-quality art, easy load-in and load-out, and free parking. The artist loves the Rio Grande shows and said the promoters are professional and supportive of their artists.

A jewelry artist who had \$7,500 in sales said Rio Grande Arts and Crafts Festivals are the best promoters. “These promoters do their job with beautiful billboards all around Albuquerque and a hefty presence, with TV ads during the Balloon Fiesta news coverage,” the artist said. “The crowds come and shop. It is festive and profitable.”

A fiber/textile/leather artist would return due to the great sales. This artist made \$20,000.

Also interested in returning is a jewelry artist who reported sales of \$4,750 and said, “It’s a great show, well-attended, and easy to do. With free parking, good access to the freeway, and options for housing.”

An artist whose mediums are fine art and arts and crafts had \$1,700 in sales and said it was the best show. “Love the management!” said this artist who wants to be invited back.

A photographer who made \$12,000 said load-in and -out were easy, sales were excellent, and the crowd was huge each day. “It was an excellent-run and marketed show,” the artist said.

Promoter’s Self-Review

Liz King said re-reading reviews of the Rio Grande Arts & Crafts Balloon Festival Show reminded her why she loves this job.

“This year’s event was one for the books — tourism to Albuquerque was very strong for this year’s International Balloon Fiesta, and tens of thousands were drawn to the area to watch the solar eclipse,” said King, director of Rio Grande Festivals. “Tour groups purchased hundreds of advance tickets to our show, which was our first early indicator that we’d be closer to normal (post-COVID-19) attendance patterns for this show.”



Balloons float above the Rio Grande Arts & Crafts Balloon Festival Show’s venue.
Photo courtesy of Rio Grande Festivals

She estimated attendance at 19,000 and said crowds were strong and steady all seven days. “Despite all event-related services increasing (by 30% in several cases), the show continues to have a very promising future in New Mexico. The venue, Sandia Resort & Casino, which is part of Sandia Pueblo, is extremely professionally run and warmly welcomes our event every year,” King said. “They are fabulous hosts, and this makes all the difference given that we’re on-site for a full month of construction. This year, they helped us to increase awareness beyond our existing advertising campaign, highlighting the festival through all their various outreach in newsletters, their own billboards, and throughout the resort. Overall, it’s a major challenge putting this event together, but it’s rewarding in every way.”

King said 61% of the artists who took their survey reported sales were above average or record-breaking. Eighty-seven percent said they would return if invited back.

“We received 4.9 / 5 stars for communication and 5 / 5 stars for management. Comments specifically praised the quality of artwork, free parking, the unique ambiance of the big white tent, along with the hot air balloons and sales,” she said.

A trend was first-time artists having lower (while not discouraging) sales and repeat artists continuing to accrue loyal customers, she said. “One sculptor pointed out that her first year, she sold very little. This year, she was up to \$19,000 in sales,” King said.

Suggestions for changes included different restroom options, decreasing the number of invited jewelers, and changing event days back to the original schedule of six days instead of seven.

“I’ve done this show for many years and have built great relationships with customers, artists, and staff members. It’s like a family reunion. Aside from that, the artwork and craftsmanship are excellent. There’s something for everyone. It’s always a mixture of new and surprising with old favorites,” said jewelry artist Sallyjane Schmoll.

Glass artists Dana and Karen Robbins said, “We always enjoy seeing our fellow artists. So much talent. This location at the casino is perfect for viewing the balloons and fireworks. Quality of the artwork is always A++. And the crew is so helpful, organized, and friendly.”

Jewelry artist Doreen Garten said, “I appreciated the ease of load-in and-out — so smooth. Good communication from the staff made our logistics smooth. The tent, floor covering, pipe and drape were ready when we arrived. The booth sitters were

pleasant people. After a long first day, I was appreciative of the party the first night. The music was perfect.”

King said consistency in staff results in higher comfort levels with their vendors. “This show has been around so long I’d say 90% of the staff at the front desk are familiar. The knowledge they carry is invaluable when there are lots of questions at once, and the friendly demeanor of the staff has become predictable,” King said. “I will always make it a high priority to make it fun and appealing for volunteers to return the next year.”

► **November 24-26, 2023; Rio Grande Arts & Crafts Festival – Holiday Show, Albuquerque, NM.** Contact: Rio Grande Arts and Crafts Festivals, Ruth Gore, Colorado Springs, CO 80919; Phone: 505-292-7457; Email: info@riograndefestivals.com; Website: riograndefestivals.com; Application fee: \$30; Space fee: \$595; Space sizes: 10x10 to 20x10; Exhibitors: 185; Attendance estimate: 7,000; Admission: \$10.
Compiled from *FastAudit* reviews

FastAudit Scores

(1=lowest; 10=highest)

Sales.....	7.8
Quality of Work.....	9.1
Balance of Mediums.....	9.2
Prestige of Show.....	8.7
Attendance.....	8.1
Weather.....	7.3
Advertising.....	8.8
Management.....	9.8
Artist Treatment.....	9.6
Artist Amenities.....	8.7
Judging and Awards.....	6.0
Layout.....	9.1
Load-In/-Out.....	9.4
Parking.....	9.2

The Rio Grande Arts & Crafts Festival – Holiday Show ranked FA51 in 2023’s *200 Best* list. All the artists who reviewed 2023’s show said they would exhibit in it again.

One ceramicist reported \$6,000 in sales and said the show had great sales and people.

A photographer who made \$4,500 said, “This is a very well-organized show and very artist friendly. Sales are always good. Attendance and sales were good. Load-in, setup, and load-out were easy and not stressful. The promoters do a good job organizing and advertising the event.”

A sculpture artist who had \$3,800 in sales said, “Great patrons in a great city, with a great promotion team.”

The sales total for one fiber/textile/leather artist was \$3,000. “The artists are treated well, and this group always does a lot of advertising to get the shoppers in,” the artist said.

It was the first time doing the show for a mixed media artist who made about \$750. This artist would like to give it another try, saying the event had good attendance, people were there to shop, and interactions were great.

A fiber/textile/leather artist who had \$15,000 in sales said, “Great show!”

A metal artist said, “Everything went well. I enjoy working with the staff and seeing fellow artists returning and hopefully doing well. It’s a good time of year to sell inventory for Christmas shopping. The decor, music, and all-around festive environment are fun.” The artist did not report the sales total.

A photographer who made \$7,000 said it was a good show and well-run and attended.

Promoter’s Self-Review

Liz King said 2023’s Rio Grande Arts & Crafts Festival – Holiday Show was logistically smooth from setup through teardown, with strong attendance that was almost back to pre-COVID-19 levels.

“From a broad perspective, the event scene has gotten more and more crowded over Thanksgiving weekend. There were several new vendor markets vying for the attention of potential patrons in Albuquerque, and a well-known art show in Santa Fe that shifted from December to the same dates,” said King, director of Rio Grande Festivals. “Luckily, with our large database of attendee contacts, as well as our base of season pass holders, we held steady with our best and most loyal buyers.” She said another thing that impacted customers was the venue’s price increase on parking, raised to match their event ticket price. “Usually, increases like this impact customers for a year or so before they forget about it,” King said.

Attendance was estimated at 7,000. “Overall, in our survey, 68% of artists reported average, above average, or positively record-breaking sales,” she said. “Fifty-two percent received follow-up orders or commissions by the time they were surveyed.”

Artists commented positively on communication (4.8 / 5 stars), management (4.9 / 5 stars), easy setup and teardown, festive atmosphere, and the overall festival family camaraderie, King said. “We also had positive comments on our annual



Jan Severson demonstrates basket weaving during the Rio Grande Arts & Crafts Festival – Holiday Show.

Photo courtesy of Rio Grande Festivals