

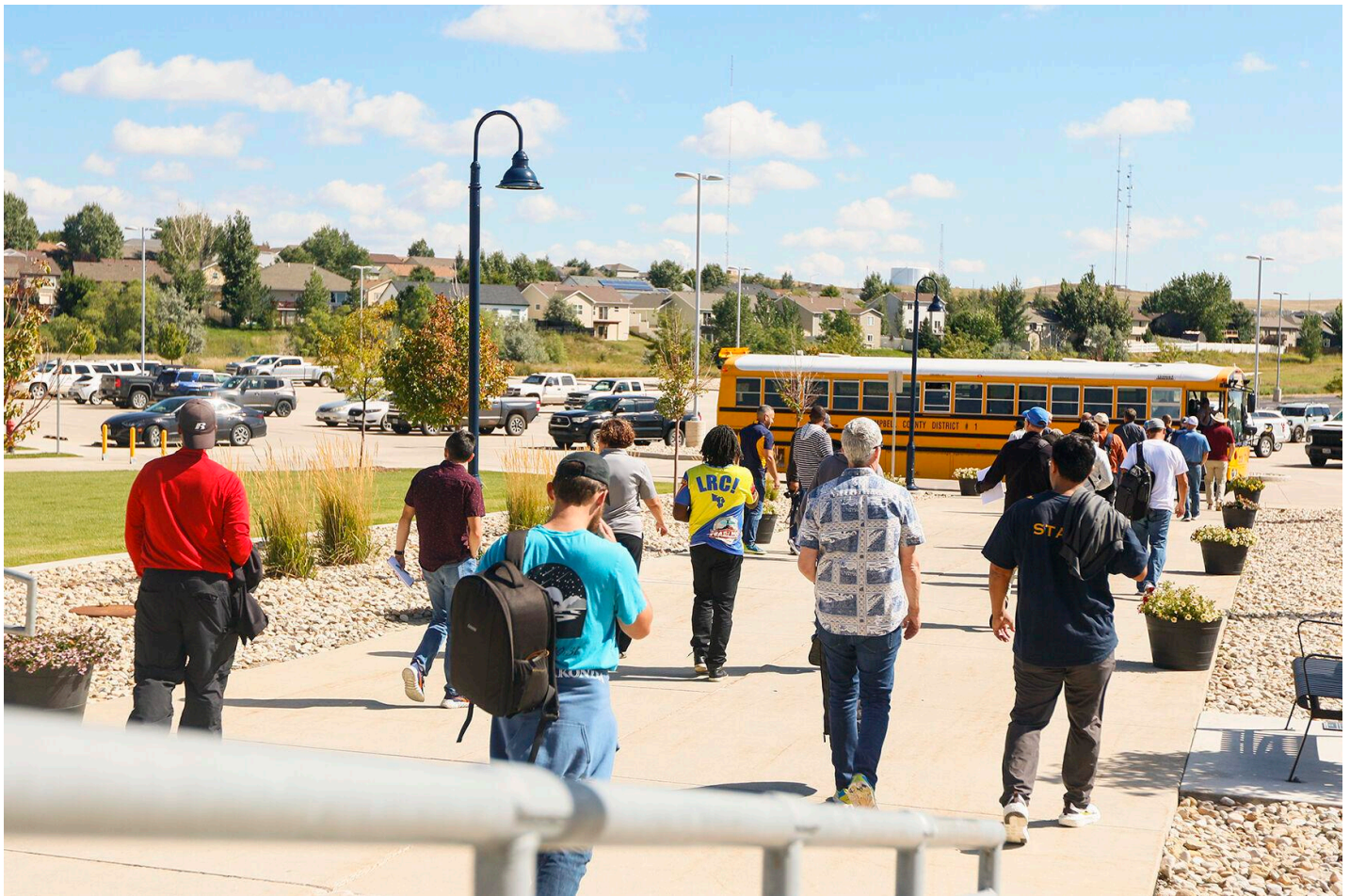
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TOP STORY

Camporee volunteers deal with shortage of housing options

By JONATHAN GALLARDO News Record Writer jgallardo@gillette newsrecord.net

Mar 16, 2024



Two school bus loads of visitors toured Gillette in September 2023 in anticipation of the 2024 International Pathfinder Camporee. The tour was one of many that have taken place since January 2021 when Gillette was announced as the event's new host.

News Record File Photo

Volunteers for the International Pathfinder Camporee have had to do some creative thinking to work around high hotel prices.

The Camporee will be in Gillette from Aug. 5-11. While all of the Pathfinders, most of them between 10 and 15 years old, will be camping out at Cam-plex, there are hundreds of volunteers coming along, and most of them won't be staying on-site.

Jessica Seders, executive director of the Campbell County Convention and Visitors Bureau, said that many hotels wouldn't take reservations more than a year out from the event. So when August came, the reservations started rolling in.

Seders said that in August 2023, the average rate for a room was \$103 a night, and as time went on, those room rates began going up. The highest she saw was \$750 a night, and it wasn't uncommon to see a motel room go for a few hundred dollars a night or more.

"It's supply and demand, the room rates increase with the demand," she said.

Pastor Ron Whitehead, the director of the International Pathfinder Camporee, said there are volunteers who are staying as far as two and a half hours from Gillette because it's more affordable.

"It's not been a big deal, but from a business standpoint, it was a communication challenge," Whitehead said.

He said the thought was that Gillette would have enough hotel rooms to accommodate everyone, but "we didn't expect this many older people to come to Camporee." Many volunteers had planned on stepping away after the last Camporee in 2019, but when they heard it was going to Wyoming in 2024, they changed their minds.

Seders said the visitors center and elected officials have been thinking outside the box to figure out ways to help the Camporee volunteers. She encouraged residents to put their homes on AirBNB and VRBO. They can rent out single rooms, floors or entire houses, and even tents can be rented out.

And the city of Gillette passed a resolution suspending the rules regarding occupancy in campers and RVs within city limits from July 31 to Aug. 13. During that two-week period, which includes Camporee, the city will allow temporary occupancy in RVs, campers and motorhomes in all residential areas.

Whitehead said Camporee will take full responsibility “if anything goes wrong with anybody’s property.”

“The Camporee will take care of it,” he said. “We want to be good neighbors.”

Jonathan Gallardo