

A&W plans big birthday shindig

90th anniversary fete to feature car show, band

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By **The Record**
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CORRECTION: 5/7/09

There was a misspelling in the original headline of this story. It has been corrected online.

LODI — Order up cake for 5,000 people, toss in a live band and a car show featuring 200 classics of chrome and gleaming paint, and what have you got?

A&W's 90th anniversary National Cruise Night, to be celebrated June 20 in Lodi, the birthplace of A&W Root Beer.

Also as part of the celebration, A&W Restaurants is running a contest that will give four folks the full VIP treatment — three nights and four days of luxury hotel accommodations, spa treatments, wine country tours, recreational outings and fine dining — as grand marshals of the 90th birthday celebration, said Peter Knight, owner of the A&W Restaurant in Lodi.

Lodi Avenue near his store will be blocked off to traffic from about 5 to 10 p.m., and the public is invited, he said.

"The cake's free. Come and look at the cars, enjoy some music and birthday cake," he said. Knight said Rancho San Miguel in Lodi will provide the dessert: vanilla cake with A&W Root Beer flavored icing.

The contest is really two contests: one open nationwide — through the A&W Restaurants Web site at www.awrestaurants.com will include transportation to and from Lodi for the winner and one guest — and a Lodi-area contest with entry available at five area locations, Food 4 Less, Rancho San Miguel, Lodi News Sentinel, Lodi Chamber of Commerce and, of course, the A&W Restaurant.

Entrants must write an essay of 250 words or less explaining why they deserve to be a grand marshal of the anniversary celebration and want to visit Lodi.

"We're basically going to have a national winner and a local winner and guest for each, so we're basically going to have four grand marshals — four VIPs," Knight said.

Helping squire the contest winners around town will be the A&W Root Beer Bear.

"He's our 7-foot-tall ambassador of fun," Knight said.

The furry brown bear clad in a bright orange beret and sweat shirt with an A&W logo is due to receive a pedicure along with the celebration marshals and their guests.

The international restaurant chain began near where the Lodi arch stands today, on Pine and Sacramento streets in downtown Lodi.

There, in 1919, Roy Allen — using a formula purchased from an

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Arizona pharmacist and which consisted of a unique blend of 16 herbs, spices, berries and barks — opened a roadside stand selling cold, creamy root beer for a nickel a mug.

He had a hit on his hand, and the business quickly grew. Not long after one of Allen's employees, Frank Wright, joined him in a partnership, which became A&W.

A&W is a subsidiary of Yum! Brands Inc. of Louisville, Ken., and includes more than 675 stand-alone A&W restaurants in 15 countries as well as another 600 outlets as part of a Yum! multi-brand restaurant.

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