

AOL 'bull'-ish on 40th Oktoberfest

Tops in California according to AOL, in the Top 10 nationwide on Ski Net—and that's no bull.

You just about have to travel all the way to Munich to find an Oktoberfest celebration that compares to the one held in Big Bear during seven fun-filled weekends beginning September 18-19 with American Heroes Weekend. After all, it's German event founded by a German immigrant, with German beer and bands and bratwurst from a German butcher.

All served in a high country mountain alpine setting reminiscent of Bavaria, in a building designed specifically to house Oktoberfest. And come to think of it, yes it even has a bull, the mechanical bucking beast named Samson. Truly there are a multitude of reasons to be bullish on Big Bear Lake Oktoberfest, which celebrates its 40th anniversary with this edition.

Once the fun starts it never ends, filling each Saturday (noon-midnight) and Sunday (noon-5:30 p.m.) with nonstop entertainment, contests like log sawing, stein holding, O'Doul's beer drinking, yodeling, and more. Opening weekend sees free admission for badge-carrying past and present military, law enforcement, and firefighters plus their immediate families.

All kinds of surprises are in store including Bear Valley Marine Corp color guard presenting the flag, Big Bear High School's choir sings the national anthem, and the official tapping of the first keg. Plus Big Bear's own Polka Tots perform and at 4 p.m. there's a tribute to the troops as part of the 40th anniversary celebration. Entertainment will be provided by longtime favorites The Express, widely considered the Southland's top German festival band.

The ultimate contest, the Oktoberfest Queen competition, gets underway Sept. 25, where ladies are judged not by beauty but a more useful attribute: the ability to carry steins, full at that, across the dance floor without spilling more than a few drops. The Queen will be determined during the finals on Oct. 16.

There's one Friday special Reveler's Night from 6 p.m.-midnight on Oct. 8, open to all ages including children, and Auf Wiedersien closing ceremonies during the Oktoberfest "Spooktacular" on Saturday, Oct. 30, as the colors are retired and there's



Burgermeister Hans Bandows rolls in the barrel as part of opening festivities; ever-popular dance floor

adult and children's Halloween costume contests with prizes.

The Express performs opening weekend plus the final three. Direct-from-Germany Die Mainfloesser Band, which entertained audiences ten years ago, helps ring in the 40th on Sept. 25-26, Oct. 2-3 and 8-10. Dance groups kick up the beat too, with a touch of polka performed by the Danube-Swabain Dancers, and high-flying feet action by the Cripple Creek Cloggers. Then there's the famous Big Bear Polka Tots, the adorable youngsters who have danced their way onto *The Tonight Show* and entertained generations.

Outdoors, enjoy the Budenstrasse (Avenue of the Booths) where vendors offering an array of unique gifts, food and



games, along with the highest elevation Biergarten (beer garden) in the United States. There's an outdoor barbecue grilling bratwursts, burgers and much more, in turn sending out tantalizing aromas

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