Smashing pumpkins kicks off November in North Logan | Journalism

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'It's fun to say goodbye to fall and Halloween by chucking a bunch of pumpkins hundreds of feet.' – Dane Hurst, civil engineer

Story and photo by Chelsea Hunter

NORTH LOGAN — By 10 o’clock Saturday morning Elk Ridge Park was already buzzing with the energy of expectant people. People waiting for a show to be put on by massive catapults ready to launch pumpkins into the air, only to smash on the ground after they made their descent against the blue of the clear autumn sky. With the combined efforts of the city and the American Society of Mechanical engineers (ASME), North Logan put on the third annual pumpkin toss as a part of the city’s Pumpkin Days. Ten teams of pumpkin tossers brought out their own catapults and trebuchets to compete for best design, farthest distance, and fastest reloading speed.

Flinging pumpkins at Elk Ridge Park marked the end of North Logan’s Pumpkin Days Saturday. Photo by Chelsea Hunter.

“All of the catapults were trebuchets,” said Phil Lundgreen of the Society of Physics Students (SPS) team and a senior at Utah State University. “A trebuchet is a catapult which involves a counterweight to propel a long throwing arm forward at an accelerated rate.”

The maximum allowed for the counterweight was 170 lbs, but about midway through it got suspended, so they were allowed to use more weight to make the pumpkins go further, although once the weight was suspended the toss didn’t count towards the competition anymore.

“It got kind of dull seeing the pumpkins only go 50 feet,” said Lundgreen.

Teams Pumpkin Hunks and SPS tied for first place in the design competition, followed by BYU’s Y Prime in second, and Spider Legs in third. The distance segment was won by Y Prime at about 100 yards, and second was the team representing USU’s Civil Engineering Honors Society at 200 feet.

“I wish we could have had more weight on our catapults to throw the pumpkins farther,” said Lundgreen. “I was really nervous when we first showed up and saw the size of the pumpkins. For the weight allowed us on our counterweights, there was no way we could throw those pumpkins very far. Luckily a local farmer donated his leftover pumpkins to the cause and we were able to get some smaller pumpkins.”

Dane Hurst also competed in the competition with his group representing the USU Civil Engineering Honors Society. They had a trebuchet in the competition last year and it did really well, he said. Being civil engineers they thought it would be fun to enter a competition sponsored by ASME in spirit of the friendly rivalry between the departments.

“Even though there were a few unexpected bumps in the way things happened, I thought everything turned out well,” said Hurst. “I was appreciative of the job ASME did in putting it all together. It was a big event and it was planned and organized very professionally.”

Even though Hurst’s team was able to use the same trebuchet they used last year, they put in roughly 50 hours to improve the design for this year’s competition and were very pleased with how well it did. “I expect that next years launch will be even bigger and better. With a team from BYU, who had a great showing, competing for the first time this year, I see more rivalries developing, and maybe even more schools getting involved.”

Bruce Hoffman, president of the ASME student section, said the main thing ASME did to recruit teams to compete was advertise on campus, mostly to the mechanical engineering students because it’s the largest engineering major in the college of engineering. So they had a lot of students in that major that were interested in the
competition. They also reached out to surrounding high schools and other universities in the state, but BYU was the only one that responded. However, anyone was allowed to compete as long as they registered and had a trebuchet.

Hoffman said it was a definite success that had great participation and an awesome turnout from the community.

“We had twice as many trebuchets as last year,” said Hoffman. “We want it to continue to grow and become more popular each year, and plan to keep this going for years to come. North Logan, they love it so much that they want to keep doing it with us every year.”

“It is just fun to say goodbye to fall and Halloween by chucking a bunch of pumpkins hundreds of feet,” said Hurst. “That is just one more reason that life is great when you are an engineer.”

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