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Duck sales raise \$35,000 for schools

GALESBURG — Members of the community came together to enjoy two long standing local traditions on Sunday.

Galesburg's Great Cardboard Boat Regatta and Galesburg Public School Foundation's rubber duck race shared the stage at Lake Storey. While the School foundation came close to reaching its goal in duck sales for this year's race, organizers of the boat regatta said that attendance for the contest was unusually low this year.

The Boat regatta preceded the duck races Sunday afternoon, celebrating its 21st annual contest. Teams from near and far and from various skill levels competed. Tom Lemon, owner and operator of the world's only cardboard boat museum in Ohio, traveled to Galesburg for the races, bringing along the team's boat "Gang Green 5."

Lemon is a seasoned cardboard boat builder and paddler, preparing to attempt a 22-mile trip on the Ohio River in a cardboard boat, a trip which he hopes will earn his team a place in the Guinness Book of World Records. Sunday marked his 14th year attending the Great Carboard Boat Regatta, an event which he says that he said has brought him lasting friendships.

"We've met people here and been friends with them ever since ... some of them are riding in the boat with me today," Lemon said.

Boat makers had the chance to compete in several different classes of boats, including a youth division and an instant boat division, where participants use a prepackaged kit of supplies to construct a boat just minutes before the races begin.

According to Elizabeth Varner, entries were down this year, with only 11 boats entered in the contest, including three instant boats. Varner compared this year's entries to 2014, when a total of 19 boats took part in the regatta.

"I think it's just kind of running its course and we'll have to consider whether or not we do it again next year," Varner said.

Local artist Suzie Richardson has created handmade trophies, made from the same type of corrugated cardboard that the boat makers use, for the winners of the boat regatta since the tradition began. Richardson expressed concern over the drop in entries for this year's contest.

"Usually you look over and see the entire hill side covered in boats," Richardson said, "I'm just hoping that I have enough people to hand these awards out to."

Though the turnout of boat makers was low, those who participated brought creative boats to the regatta, from the Galesburg Future Farmers' barn shaped boat, to a hippie inspired tie-dye boat named "one cool dude."

A crowd favorite turned out to be a team-spirit boat, supporting both the Green Bay Packers and the Chicago Bears as the teams faced one another on Chicago's Soldier Field the same afternoon.

Following the regatta, members of district 205 took to the park's water slide, each drawing ducks as they splashed into the pool. In preparation for the 20th annual Rubber Duck Race, ducks were sold to the community for \$5 dollars each with proceeds then being distributed amongst the schools in the district. The foundation raised more than \$35,000 for the district, according to Patti Bibo, administrator at the Galesburg Public Schools Foundation.

The fundraising was a community wide effort, including the efforts by individual schools. Galesburg High School received the Top School award, selling a total of 851 ducks, while Gale Elementary School received the Percentage Ducky Award, given to the school that sold the most ducks per student enrollment.

The owners of the selected ducks were each awarded a prize, including memberships to the Galesburg YMCA, gift certificates to Kohl's Diamond Gallery and donations from various other local businesses. The \$2,000 grand prize, sponsored by G & M Distributors, went to Bernadine Fleisher. Denise Foote of Galesburg took home the \$1,000 second place prize, sponsored by Galesburg Anesthesiologists.

Tom Hawkins, principal of Churchill Junior High, said that his school will likely use its money to bring authors to his school for special readings. In the past, Hawkins said the funds have also helped send teachers to receive special training and purchase technology and software for the school.

Jon Bradburn, director of Human Resources for District 205, explained that the money from community fundraising efforts like the Duck Race help the district through tough financial times.

"We're always trying to find ways to do more with less when the budget gets tight," Bradburn said.

Bradburn said that the extra money will allow the schools to make purchases that they otherwise would be unable to afford because of budget restrictions.

In 2014, the duck race raised \$54,000 for schools.



Geoff Bergstrom of King Elementary School makes a splash as he grabs a duck during the 20th annual Galesburg School Foundation's Rubber Duck Race Sunday afternoon at Lake Storey in Galesburg. BILL NICE/The Register-Mail

