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## Punkin Chunkin continues to captivate

Crowd estimated at 70,000 drawn to annual oddity near Bridgeville

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Punkin Chunkin is growing, and event organizers of the annual event near Bridgeville welcome it.

"It just continues to grow. We're offering more services and the oddity of the event helps," said John Huber, President of the World Championship Punkin Chunkin Association.

Weekend results from the event show that about 70,000 people descended on the Wheatley Farm to watch 2,000 pumpkins launched into the air by contestants. That's a 30 percent to 35 percent increase in attendance from last year, Huber said, adding that the tally isn't official yet.

Huber said the contest keeps growing every year and new winners keep emerging.

"It's definitely gotten tougher," Huber said. "Every year, an old champ steps down and a new one steps up."

This year, the winner was a team dubbed the Big 10-inch, which shot a pumpkin 4,162 feet. The Big 10-inch was the only competitor to go over 4,000 feet this year. The runner-up was Old Glory, which blasted a pumpkin 3,939 feet.

New to the Punkin Chunkin experience was a tailgating section for revelers. Huber said that event drew hundreds of people. Throughout the weekend, spectators listened to live bands, entered cooking contests and won prizes.

Huber said the association ordered 3,000 pumpkins from farms in the area, but not all of them were used. The leftover pumpkins are biodegradable and are plowed under by farmers in the area. Festival organizers will have teams cleaning up for the next few days.

Punkin Chunkin might continue to grow, Huber says. The Science Channel will air a special program on the event on Thanksgiving this year, adding to its notoriety. The Delaware contest also has been featured in magazines. Enthusiasts who like the sport keep bringing in others, Huber said.

"That's a part of it," Huber said. "I think people like the camaraderie."

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