

Projectile pumpkins

First-ever pumpkin-flinging competition pits [engineering](#) companies against each other

By Sarah Bultema
Loveland Reporter-Herald

Bright orange pumpkins flew across the blue October sky — and soon thumped and shattered on the dirt below — when dozens of the gourds were launched across a field Saturday at Loveland's Osborn Farm.

It was the first-ever Pirates of the Plains Pumpkin Chunkin' Competition and fundraiser, and local engineering companies took their best shot at hurling pumpkins with their own custom-made machines.

The event, which was free for spectators, raised money for the Colorado State [University](#) student chapters of the American Society of Civil Engineers and Associated General [Contractors](#).

"People usually hold golf tournaments to raise money," said Timiry Krieger of CTL Thompson, which sponsored the event. "We wanted to break away and do something different, with an engineering flair."

During the competition, the orange orbs didn't always hit the 50-, 100- and 200-yard targets.

However, the crowd of more than 100 happily tilted heads toward the sky to "ooh," "ahh" and admire each launch and what a little math and science could do.



First in line for the chunk were the CTL Squash Bucklers, who designed and built a trebuchet to launch their pumpkins.

Similar to a catapult, the device worked by dropping weights on one end of a lever, which flung the other end in the air. This force sent the pumpkin, which was in an attached sling, up and over the machine and soaring into the sky.

The team had never built anything like it before, said Tom Finley, one of the members. But after a few practice shots, they were able to adjust the distance by adding more or less weight. Quickly, they began hitting closer to the targets.



Fort Collins' The Engineering Company's team built an air cannon to propel their produce.

Although the machine looked the most menacing out of the bunch, its first few shots were anything but.

Following a dramatic "Fire in the hole" call, a loud bang and cloud of smoke, the pumpkin simply rolled out of the cannon and landed about 5 yards away.

However, the team was not discouraged. The machine, which launches objects by building up pressure behind it, was originally designed to chuck much larger pumpkins.

"These pumpkins were not big enough and were losing air behind them," said Amber Kauffman of the team.

Finding larger pumpkins in the field, the team was soon hurling them nearly 100 yards downrange.

Yet no team had more accuracy or distance than the Sunstate Equipment Co. team and its catapult.

Team member J.D. Hale had designed a model of the machine on an Erector Set before constructing the massive, full-size version.

During the competition, the catapult swung pumpkins up to 123 yards down the field, giving the team a first-place win.

"It was really good. We had a lot of fun," said Hale, noting he's already thinking of modifications for next year's pumpkin chunkin' game.

"We're definitely doing it again next year," he said.