

TNT: Tacoma glass artists create Cinderella-worthy glass pumpkin



When it comes to big pumpkins, Ron Barker is a hard man to impress.

He measures the size and structure of pumpkins at the Washington State Fair and is a longstanding member of the Pacific Northwest Giant Pumpkin Growers. This year, a whopper he grew in his Sumner field topped out at 1,081.5 pounds, second largest in the state.

So why would a piddling pumpkin with a hoped-for diameter of 97 inches and a weight of about 60 pounds be worthy of his attention?

It's made of glass.

After watching more than two hours of intricate choreography, Barker was smitten by the creation crews from the Tacoma Glassblowing Studio and the Hilltop Artists birthed Thursday at the Museum of Glass.

“Every time they took that thing out of the kiln, I thought, ‘Man that’s getting to be pretty good sized,’ ” Barker said. “Our pumpkins can grow 25 to 55 pounds per day, so to see that thing growing like it did was cool.”

Although invited to put his approval of size and weight on the piece, Barker never got the chance. Two team members in flame-retardant gear whisked the pumpkin away to an annealer, or cooling box, before he could even squat down to check.

No worries. First it needs to cool down from 900 degrees Fahrenheit, then Barker will be back with his measuring tape.

Once he verifies the estimates, the glass pumpkin will be declared the largest ever blown in the Pacific Northwest. Since there’s no known official record of such a feat, it’s unlikely to spark much debate.

And it’s doubtful it will challenge the world record set by the Corning Glass Museum in upstate New York — a 70-pound monster created in 2009 with an 8-foot circumference.

Nevertheless, the crews using the Museum of Glass facility felt redeemed. An attempt in 2013 lacked enough glass for its size, causing it to expand too thin and then break apart from cooling too fast.

This year, the Tacoma Glassblowing Studio artists refined their technique and last week created three similarly sized practice pumpkins to prepare for the big event.

Before a packed house on an admission-free Thursday evening, they grew a pumpkin big and beautiful enough that Cinderella might have traded in her coach for it.

“When it comes to any piece that large, it’s always touch and go,” said glass artist Brian Farmer. “You have to battle the weight, and it’s a lot harder to control.

“It’s a lot of build-up for those last few moments of chaos, but we’re definitely happy with the result.”

On appearance alone, Barker, who had never seen glassblowing in person before, gave it a green thumbs-up.

“It took a lot of skill to do that,” he said. “I was really impressed.”

Did he make any mental comparisons to his own efforts?

“Growing a glass one’s faster,” he said with a grin. “Takes a lot less fertilizer.”

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SEEING THE GLASS PUMPKIN

The glass pumpkin will be part of Tacoma Glassblowing Studio’s glass pumpkin patch on display from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday (Oct. 24) at Pioneer Park Pavilion in Puyallup.

After that, it will be on display at the Museum of Glass, 1801 Dock St, Tacoma, from Oct. 25 through Halloween.

Read more here: <http://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article39608454.html#storylink=cpy>