



WEIGH-OFF: Championship staff carefully place a gargantuan gourd on a 5-ton capacity, industrial-strength digital scale under the watchful eyes of San Mateo County officials. ROY MCDOWELL/THE EPOCH TIMES

1,524-Pound Giant Pumpkin Crowned King

Rookie pumpkin grower dethrones six-time champion and sets new world record

By ROY MCDOWELL
Epoch Times San Francisco Staff

HALF MOON BAY, Calif.—A whopping 1,524-pound pumpkin from Oregon won this year's Safeway World Championship Pumpkin Weigh-Off and set a new record for the World Pumpkin Capitol of Half Moon Bay, Calif.

The weigh-ins began at 7:00 a.m. and didn't finish until 11:30 a.m. on Oct. 8. Under the watchful eyes of hundreds of gourd growers, visitors, and officers from San Mateo County, the monster pumpkins were carefully placed on a 5-ton capacity, industrial-strength digital scale.

"This is the first time I came over here. It's just the size! This size is just amazing!" said Tom Walker from San Francisco.

Rookie giant pumpkin grower Thad Starr from Pleasant Hill, Ore., unseated six-time champion Joel Holland from Puyallup, Wash., whose 1,384-pound pumpkin landed in second place.

"I'm happy with the weight. It's a good three-year run. I had my time in the light. I'm happy to pass it on to Thad. Congratulate him for his wonderful 1,524-pound pumpkin... I will come back next year," conceded Holland who is also vying for a comeback.

After the weigh-off, when talking about growing a giant pumpkin, Thad said, "There is really no secret to it. Giant pumpkin grow-

ers are the most generous and caring people you will know. You need meticulous care to one plant."

Thad started growing giant pumpkins in a contest between his brother and himself. "We had no idea of what we were doing. We were thrilled by 100 pounds," said the new champ. "My brother beats me on everything in my whole life. I will never let him beat me on pumpkins."

The winner takes in \$6 for every pound of his gargantuan pumpkin,

which this year totaled more than \$900. Thad planned to take his giant pumpkin back to his hometown and put it on display.

The winning pumpkin and the top five from the weigh-off will be on display at the Half Moon Bay Art and Pumpkin Festival, which is scheduled for the Oct. 13 weekend from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the historical Main Street.

"It's wonderful event. It's very popular, and it's the fall tradition," said Tim Beeman, the spokesperson for the championship event. "We have arts and music and wonderful food, three stages of entertainment. It's just a wonderful event for family and for everyone."



PRIZE PUMPKINS: A giant pumpkin is carefully measured by officials from the San Mateo County Department of Agriculture and Weights & Measures. ROY MCDOWELL/THE EPOCH TIMES

What's all the Ruckus?

A tech company's attempt to get college students to stop pirating music

By WENDY TANG
NYU Livewire

Imagine your Facebook or MySpace account, with a feature that lets you share music files. That's Ruckus—the latest corporate effort to entice students into downloading music for not-quite-free.

The Herndon, Virginia company has created software to allow students to browse other members' music archives—and to download full tracks at no cost.

"It's 100 percent free for all college students!" Ruckus' Web site claims. The company says it makes 2.4 million tracks available.

The minor catch: to take it away from your desktop, you have to pay. It costs \$4.99 per month to download the music into a portable device.

And you can't download music into an iPod, by far the most ubiquitous portable music device on college campuses.

"Primarily, people go to the Web site to explore and discover that world of music," said Ruckus CEO Mike Bebel, a music industry executive and entrepreneur who briefly ran Napster in 2003, in a podcast interview posted on the Ruckus Web site.

Ruckus initially signed deals with universities, which agreed to publicize the service to their students. Ruckus says it's struck deals with more than 100 colleges, among them Princeton, the University of Southern California, the University of Pennsylvania, Michigan State University, the University of Dayton, Georgia Tech, Ball State, the University of Minnesota, the University of Delaware, and Washington University in St. Louis—and that hundreds of thousands of students are using the service.

But in an effort to grow faster, Ruckus is now offering its services to any student at a U.S. college who has a dot-edu email address.

Four major labels and thousands of independent ones have licensed music to Ruckus, agreeing to let users download music at no cost. The service is supported by banner advertising and membership fees.

Ruckus only supports devices that use Microsoft's Windows media formats, such as SanDisk, iRiver, and Creative, or portable phones or other multi-media devices ensured by Microsoft's Digital Rights Management (DRM) technology.

Some students said the service was attractive anyway.

Janice Hung, an economics and marketing major at Washington University in St. Louis, has signed up—she likes the fast, accessible service.

But others found the lack of free portability a major negative.

"I don't think I will use it," said Jeremy Anderson, a recent gradu-

ate of the State University of New York at Albany. "It's too much restriction, especially on DRM, and what if people don't have the right player?" said Anderson, who has nine years of experience using digital file sharing software. He said he disliked the block against free music transfer to a portable device.

Amanda Lee, a junior at Occidental College in Los Angeles, was likewise unimpressed.

"I think Ruckus' services seem to be a bit of a hassle," she said. "I kind of prefer the cost to be paid up front [like iTunes' pay per song system] if there was a cost, and I pretty much have all my downloaded music on my iPod."

"People get frustrated when they can't use music freely once they own it," agreed Frankie Fredericks, CEO of the independent music label Cōñar Records. DRM, he said, seems to be hitting consumers with a yellow light.

Alumni and faculty with dot-edu email addresses can use the service, but for an \$8.99 monthly fee.

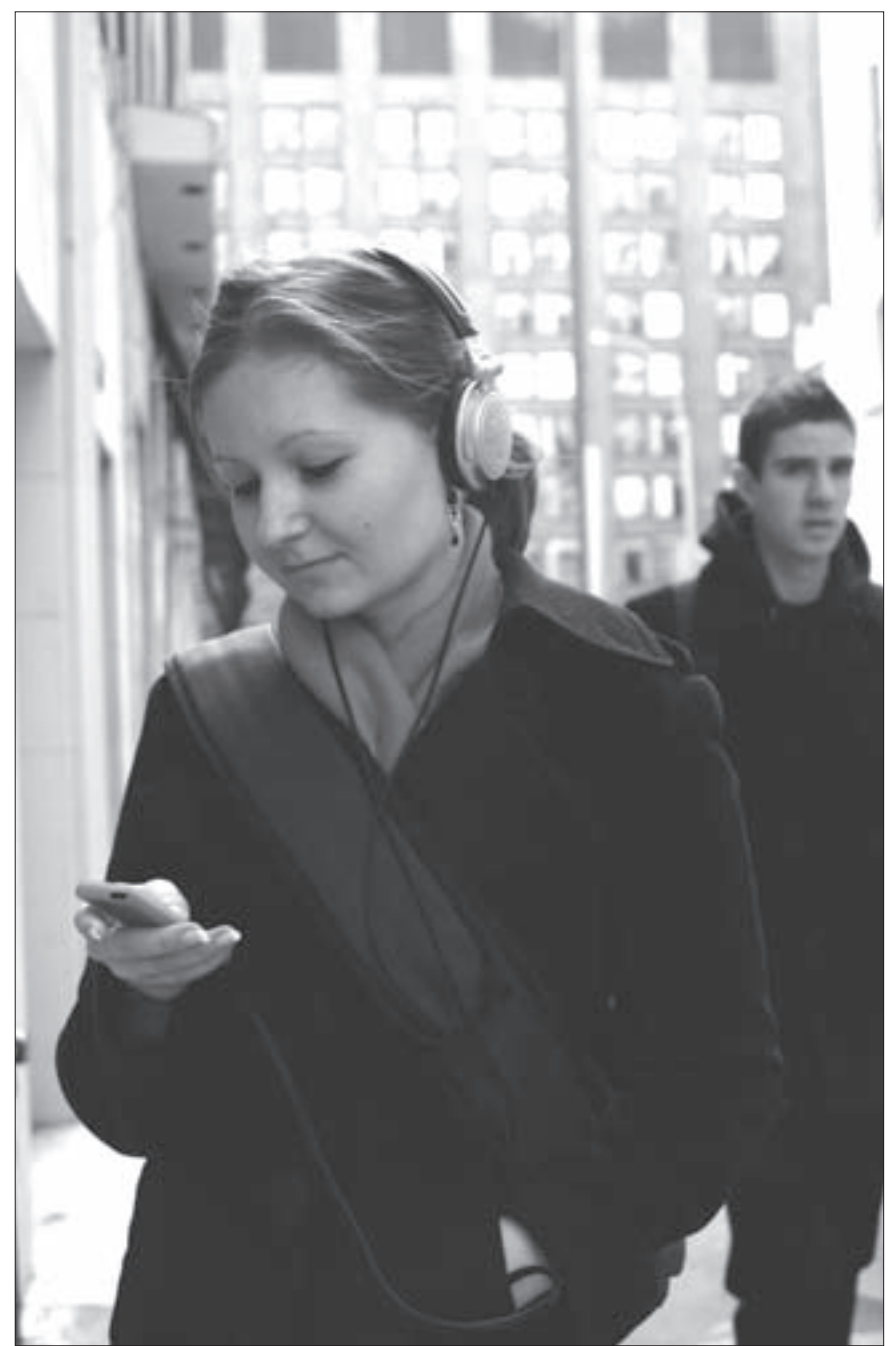
The technology industry often debates whether peer-to-peer software should be covered by "fair use." During the Napster case in 2001, performers and recording companies took legal action to shut down such software, and the Napster site. Similar software, like Kazaa and Limewire quickly replaced Napster, and today millions of users worldwide are still sharing files—both legally and illegally. Much of the illegal file-sharing still happens on college campuses.

The Recording Industry Association of America sued over 20,000 music fans for file sharing between 2003 and 2006, according to statistics from Electronic Frontier Foundation.

File sharers have been duly frightened. College students who use on-campus high-speed networks to transfer digital files are a big RIAA target.

Ruckus points out that it offers a legal safety net for college students who might not know what's legal and what's not.

The company "hopes that offering a free service through Ruckus will in fact, put the kids on a safe and legal platform that licenses and provides revenues back to the industry," said Bebel in the podcast.



NOT FREE: No iPods allowed. Ruckus, a free music downloading service, only works with Microsoft Windows media. WENDY TANG/NYU LIVESIRE

Starbucks Recalls 250,000 Plastic Cups

WASHINGTON (Reuters)—Starbucks Corp., the world's biggest coffee shop chain, recalled 250,000 children's plastic cups made in China after receiving reports of the cups breaking and posing a choking hazard. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) said

Starbucks received seven reports of the cups breaking, including two reports in which a child began to choke on a piece of the cup.

No injuries were reported, the CPSC said in a statement. The recall covers four styles of plastic 10-ounce cups with lids shaped like

a red ladybug, green turtle, pink bunny, and yellow chick, the CPSC said. The children's cups were sold for about \$6 each at Starbucks stores from May 2006 to August 2007.

If the cup is dropped, the face on the cup can break off and leave small parts or sharp exposed edges that can pose a choking or laceration hazard to young children, the CPSC said. Consumers should take the recalled cups away from children and contact Starbucks for a refund. The company is also offering a complimentary beverage as an incentive to return the recalled cups, the CPSC said.

The CPSC posted photos of the recalled cups on its Web site at: <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/prerell/prhml08108017.html>.

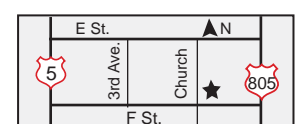


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Blackwater Could Pay \$136 Million in Compensation

BLACKWATER CONTINUED FROM A1

Blackwater has said its guards responded lawfully to a hostile threat against a U.S. State Department convoy it was guarding, but Dabbagh said the investigation had also found there was no evidence they had come under fire.

The incident caused outrage among Iraqis who see security contractors like Blackwater as private armies that act with impunity.

Blackwater employs about 1,000 people in Iraq. Its founder, former U.S. Navy SEAL Erik Prince, told a Congressional hearing last week that his men had come under small-arms fire and "returned fire at threatening targets."

U.S. and Iraqi officials working on a joint committee have also begun investigating the shooting.

A larger U.S. inquiry into the operations of private contractors in Iraq is also under way, while U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has ordered tighter controls on Blackwater.

The State Department will also send diplomatic security agents to accompany each convoy protected by Blackwater guards.

A Libyan intelligence agent was found guilty in 2001 of the bombing of a Pan Am flight over Lockerbie, which killed 270 peo-

ple including 189 Americans.

In March 2003, Libya reached a political settlement with the United States and Britain to accept civil responsibility for the bombing, with Libya agreeing to pay about \$2.7 billion in total compensation.



EXPLANATION: Erik Prince, chairman of the Prince Group, LLC and Blackwater USA, testifies during a House Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearing. MARK WILSON/GETTY IMAGES