

Jellyfish pumpkin takes grand prize in VIMS carving contest

By Erin Kelly

(November 1, 2013) The gelatinous zooplankton most commonly known as a jellyfish took top prize in the Virginia Institute of Marine Science's second-annual pumpkin-carving contest.

VIMS Ph.D. student Itchika Sivaipram carved the winning entry, which received 89 likes on Facebook. An album containing all of the entries was published to the page early Halloween morning, and voting—which was open to all Facebook users—went until 9 p.m.

The VIMS' "Pumpkano" contest—inspired by the yellowish-orange hues of the Florida pompano, a common visitor to Chesapeake Bay during autumn—encouraged participants to transform their Halloween pumpkins into marine creatures. Participants submitted pictures of their spooky carvings by posting them to the VIMS Facebook page at www.facebook.com/fbvims, or by tagging their "tweets" using the VIMS Twitter handle @VIMS_News.



Sivaipram's winning pumpkin closely resembles the real thing.



VIMS graduate student Britt Dean carved this spooky coccolithophore pumpkin. On the right is the real thing: a single-celled marine protist that makes its shell out of calcium carbonate.

"I decided to carve a jellyfish because I saw them from the VIMS Seawater Pier all summer long while collecting samples for my research, which focuses on crab recruitment processes in lower Chesapeake Bay," says Sivaipram. "They make me think of freedom, how they float and drift so effortlessly in the water, so I figured that would be something interesting to carve into a pumpkin."

Sivaipram hails from Yala, Thailand, where pumpkin carving isn't a celebrated autumn tradition as it is here in the United States. "I've only carved a few pumpkins in my lifetime," she says. Sivaipram teamed up with VIMS Marine Scientist Jenny Dreyer to carve last year's winning anglerfish entry. "Jenny inspired me to try my hand at carving my own pumpkin this year."

In second place, Dreyer's "shark eating fish" pumpkin received 62 likes. Shane Roberts tied with Dreyer with

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Virginia Institute of Marine Science
School of Marine Science
College of William and Mary
Gloucester Point, VA 23062
(804) 684-7000

his “Great White Shark” pumpkin. Keeping with the shark theme, Evan McOmber’s masterpiece—which featured a shark appearing to be protruding from the pumpkin—took third place with 57 likes. The winning entry earned a \$25 gift certificate to the VIMS Gift Shop.

Other popular entries included a “spooky coccolithophore” pumpkin, a “humpback whale breach” pumpkin, and a mud crab pumpkin, among many others.

David Malmquist, Director of Communications at VIMS, says the contest is “a light-hearted way to engage the public in the marvels of marine biodiversity.” This year’s entries show how diverse marine life truly is, with participants carving creatures from two different taxonomic kingdoms, four different phyla, and eight different classes.

“Next year we expect even more amazing entries,” says Malmquist, “maybe some ghost crabs, goblin sharks, spook fish, or zombie worms.” He thanks Belmont Pumpkin Farm in Gloucester, which generously provided 20 free pumpkins to the VIMS community for use in the contest. Indeed, the winning entry was a Belmont pumpkin.

Pictures of all of the entries are available on the VIMS Flickr page at http://www.flickr.com/photos/vims_photos/sets/72157637191896225/.



Julia Tesoro’s breaching humpback pumpkin is a mirror image of the real thing.