



A few years ago a small gathering of friends started driving cars over the edge of an old gravel pit. It has grown into an annual event attended by big crowds.



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"Flying Cars" Draw Big Crowds To Rural Gravel Pit

Brett Moravitz has helped his uncle Bob fly cars, a bus and even a pontoon boat to the wild cheers of big crowds. What started as a small gathering of friends driving cars over the edge of an old gravel pit grew into a crowd of 2,500 this past summer with a variety of "flying" vehicles.

"We don't do it every year and now we're not sure we'll do it again," says Moravitz. "As it went from 50 to 2,500 people it has become a lot of work, even with lots of volunteers."

The idea for the car launch grew out of a discussion about the abandoned gravel pit on his uncle's farm. "There is a long hill

that leads up to the edge of the pit," explains Moravitz. "Somebody suggested that before it was reclaimed, they should run a car up and over."

At the first gathering, the launch consisted of setting a brick on the gas pedal of a car that was no longer road worthy. Aimed at the hill when put in gear, the result was less than hoped for.

"A cousin and his friend knew a bit about remote controls and rigged up the next car with remotes," says Moravitz.

The results got a lot of attention in the community and more people showed up for the next event and it has grown every

year. This year's event involved more than 20 cars, a 60-passenger bus, and a pontoon boat mounted on a stripped down Buick. One vehicle flew over the edge about every 15 min.

Part of the preparation for the launch includes removing all glass from the vehicles. Kill switches are installed for safety, in case remote steering fails.

Expenses include insurance, toilets and fuel. Area organizations serve food as fundraisers. This year the event raised about \$17,052 for St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital.

"A lot of people donated more than the \$10

admission," says Moravitz. "Donations also came from local businesses, the Turtle Lake Fire Department, and scrap proceeds from donated cars."

Volunteers are key to the event, notes Moravitz. Local school groups even return the next day to pick up remaining debris.

"There is concern that something could go wrong, and we don't want that to happen. There are no more car launches planned as of this time," says Moravitz.

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Brian Sobaski's artwork appears at festivals, state fairs and other outdoor venues that have plenty of room for his big scale straw sculptures.



"Running of the Bull" is a whimsical line-up of farm animals including a bunny pushing a bull in a wheelbarrow.

Artist Creates Animated Straw Sculptures

After years of experience as a trained artist working with wood, metal, cloth and other materials, Brian Sobaski found the medium he thinks he was meant to work with — straw. Instead of fancy galleries, his artwork appears at festivals, state fairs and other outdoor venues with room for his big scale straw sculptures. One of his latest exhibits was at the Iowa State Fair. "Running of the Bull" was a whimsical line-up of farm animals including a bunny pushing a bull in a wheelbarrow.

Sobaski's sculptures are framed with metal and cedar posts with hinges for articulation. He holds straw in place with twine and "bashes" the straw with a giant wooden Vietnamese wooden ladle to create muscle structure.

"With the twine I can pull it out or add more straw. I make it very loose and so it looks like a cloud," he explains. The sculptures,

as tall as 22 ft., are secured in place with welded metal and giant rebar staples placed underground and covered with woodchips. Sobaski credits his engineering business partner, Tracy Baresh, for making sure the lightweight sculptures don't blow away.

Most of the artist's work is commissioned for specific events and sites. He asks clients many questions and provides sketches and models before creating the final piece. The final sculpture is often assembled onsite with local straw or hay and becomes a participatory performance.

"People like how the characters are telling a story and like the idea of it being made with natural materials. People love how they make them feel — happy, lively, fun," Sobaski says.

They also recognize it is temporary. A straw sculpture only lasts a month or two before it turns grey, sags and morphs into a "monster" that composts and can be used to

grow mushrooms, he notes.

Possible subjects are endless from animals to a 40 by 60-ft. pumpkin mosaic to a 22-ft. tall beehive with a turnstile on the inside that moves bees on the outside.

Engaged couples also contact him for straw sculptures for their farm-themed weddings.

"My favorite piece is always the next one I'm working on. People want to outdo the last one," he says.

For more information about ordering a custom sculpture or to see samples of his work, check out Sobaski's website.

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