

Hot Springs Sentinel-Record

Stranger things Rivalry, 'buffalo' heat up tub races

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This article was published June 4, 2017 at 4:00 a.m.



The Sentinel-Record/Lorien E. Dahl FROM AFAR: A "Stranger Things"-themed tub team from Austin, Texas, races during the 12th annual Stuart Pennington Running Of The Tubs Saturday. The team was the first out-of-state team to compete in the event.

Hundreds of spectators soaked up the fun Saturday morning, cheering and hurling water balloons at teams ambitiously racing bath tubs down Central Avenue in front of Bathhouse Row.

The 12th Annual Stuart Pennington Running Of The Tubs featured a dozen teams pushing novelty-themed bathtubs through a barrage of audience-projected water balloons and water gun blasts down to the finish line in front of Buckstaff Bath House.



The Sentinel-Record/Lorien E. Dahl STAMPEDE: The Hot Springs Buffalo, including Bethannie Newsom Steelman, left, and Shea Childs, make their way down ...

The popular event featured a handful of peculiarities this year. Along with the annual Battle of the Badge, the race included its first out-of-state team and a "herd" of buffalo.

The Hot Springs Police Department was this year's victor in the hotly contested Battle Of The Badge against the Hot Springs Fire Department. The rivalry, which kicked off the annual tub races, was won by the fire department in 2016, a victory that had ushered in a fair amount of trash talk between the two departments prior to Saturday's competition.

The police department also won the modified tub category, with a tub that took the appearance of a S.W.A.T. vehicle, while Riser Ford Lincoln took the trophy in the traditional tub category with its "Jaws Returns" theme. The Critical Care Chicks from CHI St. Vincent Hot Springs, who dressed as nuns, took the award for "most spirited," while the Maxwell Blade Theatre of Magic Tribute Tub took "best tub" with its decorative playing cards and team of Maxwell Blade impersonators. Finally, "Most Original Tub" went to The Waters Hotel, which gave its vessel a hillbilly theme.

The police department squeezed out its victory by half a tub length.

"We got us a new team together, and we were victorious this year," said Omar Cervantes, an HSPD S.W.A.T. member who was pushing the tub.

Firefighters were reluctant to give their rivals much credit for their victory, however.

"We wanted to give 'em the first race just to keep the rivalry going," Allen Goenes, fire department co-captain, said. "We'll get 'em next year."

The police team was also the victor in a heat against the Quapaw Bath House and Arlington Resort Hotel & Spa, and a second heat against Habitat For Humanity and the team of friends from Austin, Texas.

"We got 'em all," Cervantes said. "It was great."

The Austin, Texas, team was the first out-of-state team to enter in the Running Of The Tubs. Brett Beeler, one of the team's members, said that he stumbled upon the event while looking for fun things to do in small towns.

"I wandered across one of those lists online -- you know, like '20 best small town things in the country.' This popped up, and I was like, 'Arkansas? We're in Texas. That's not that far away,'" he said.

The team proudly wore the theme "Keep Austin Strange" by dressing up their tub -- and themselves -- after the Netflix original series "Stranger Things." The team split their heats, coming in second to the police department in their second and edging out the fire department in their first.

Overall, the team had positive things to say about Running Of The Tubs.

"I really love the aggressiveness of the town people," team member Chris Boylan, who was dressed as Barb Holland from the series, said. "They really motivate you with all the balloon pelting."

Team member Jen Guerra said that the team will be returning to the Spa City for Running Of The Tubs in 2018. She said that her team has to "beat those cops."

Riser, which entered the 2017 event as the winner of the 2016 traditional tub category, successfully defended its title against the Maxwell Blade team with a little help from the Hot Springs Buffalo, a group of women dressed in bison outfits who emerged at the intersection of Mountain Street and Central Avenue and slowed the magical look-alikes in the home stretch.

The Buffalo, created in honor of the buffaloes that escaped from a local farm and roamed the Lakeside neighborhood in 2015, hampered the advances of numerous tubs throughout the course of the races. Goenes said that this herd was "kind of nasty on the judges' part."

While the buffalo slowed the advances of some, Riser's team didn't seem to mind. Josh Ringgold, the dealership's finance director, said that his team's results reflected his tub's theme.

"You saw the result -- a wipeout," Ringgold said.

Ringgold said that Riser will "return" to the races next year.

"We're so happy to be part of this event and be part of the community," he said.

"Everyone had a great time," Visit Hot Springs CEO Steve Arrison said. "The great thing is, everyone participates."



The Sentinel-Record/Lorien E. Dahl BATTLE OF THE BADGE: Members of the Hot Springs Police Department and the Hot Springs Fire Department



race in the B...

The Sentinel-Record/Lorien E. Dahl AUTO JAWS: Members of the Riser Ford Lincoln "Jaws Returns" team are sprayed with water guns during the 12th Annual ...