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Cal Poly Float Wins Lathrop K. Leishman Trophy at 2015 Rose Parade
Universities' Float 'Soaring Stories' Honored as California-Grown Certified for the Fourth Consecutive Year



PASADENA, Calif. — The Cal Poly universities' Tournament of Roses Parade float has done it again.

For the 53rd time since 1949, the only student-built float earned special honors at the 126th Tournament of Roses Parade held New Year's Day. "Soaring Stories" won the Lathrop K. Leishman Trophy for the most beautiful non-commercial float.

"A lot of texts have been flying. Everybody is excited," Josh D'Acquisto, Cal Poly's Rose Parade float advisor, said two hours before the parade began. " 'Boy Scouts will be front of the float,' is what we always say. If you win a trophy then there are Boy Scouts out in front of your float carrying a banner. You always want to be led by the Boy Scouts."

The float was constructed by students from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and their counterparts at California State Polytechnic University in Pomona. "Soaring Stories" depicts a fairytale castle and mythological griffin springing to life from the pages of storybooks, reflecting the parade theme "Inspiring Stories."

"This year, our design is very different from our concept," said Tiffany Geery, the design chair and a fourth-year industrial engineering student. "The initial concept had a volcano and a dinosaur on it. The design team took the idea of books coming to life from the concept and brainstormed ideas for stories, which is how we ended up with our design."



The finished float is the culmination of thousands of hours of effort. The float passed hundreds of thousands of people along the 5.5-mile route on Colorado Boulevard in Pasadena and was seen by an international television audience estimated in the millions.

In a first for the universities, the 18- by 55-foot float used photovoltaic panels to animate flags on the castle's three tallest spires. In another first, the back of the float included a wall of living flowers instead of cut flowers that traditionally adorn Rose Parade floats.

The entry also featured a waterfall with recirculating water. Other animated elements included the griffin's wings, the castle's drawbridge, a fish jumping out of the moat, the flickering candle flame and a quill that moved as if someone was writing. The tallest tower spire was 30 feet.

"As I've said many times, the float project is the epitome of Learn by Doing," said Cal Poly President Jeffrey D. Armstrong. "We have students in all manner of majors, on campuses 250 miles apart, working together across disciplines toward a common goal.

"Additionally, it continues to bring together our entire Cal Poly family — students, parents and alumni — as well as residents of both communities who take pride in seeing this float in action in Pasadena."

The creative process took a core group of 100 students on each campus about a year to complete. Scores of additional students helped out on weekends during the academic year and full time after fall's final exams in the sprint to New Year's Day.

"Ultimately it's the students' labor of love," said D'Acquisto, Cal Poly's float advisor. "For our students, it's all about watching that float come around the corner on New Year's morning. Tears flooding down ... such a big deal, calling mom or dad from Pasadena and having them also experience it while watching on the television. That's where it is."



“Soaring Stories” is the universities’ 67th consecutive entry in the annual Pasadena parade. Over the years, floats have earned such honors as the Bob Hope Humor and Viewers Choice awards, Fantasy and Founder’s trophies, Princess Award and last year’s Crown City Innovation Award. “Bedtime Buccaneers,” the 2014 entry, used 1,800 computer-animated vials to animate flowers and create the illusion of rippling waves at the front of a children’s bed-turned-pirate-ship.

This is the first time the universities’ entry has won the Leishman Trophy, named in honor of the former president and grand marshal of the Tournament of Roses, who was often called “Mr. Rose Bowl” or “Mr. Pasadena.” Leishman died in 1995.

In addition to innovations over the years, Cal Poly float builders have embraced sustainability by using cleaner-burning propane to fuel the float instead of gasoline or diesel. And by using locally grown flowers, the students reduce the float’s carbon footprint.

This is the fourth consecutive year that the float has earned the designation of “Californian Grown,” a distinction bestowed by the California Cut Flower Commission. At least 85 percent of the flowers and plant materials used to decorate the float must come from California.

A contingent of 200 Cal Poly students, friends and family seated in front of the Norton Simon Museum, directly in front of cameras from KTLA and the Hallmark channel, D’Acquisto said.

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