

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

# 3, 2, 1, Blast off! Rockets launched in W. San Jose

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Photographs by MARK TANTRUM

From launch to landing, Cub Scouts, their parents and scoutmasters, with their mouths agape, stood watching as soda bottle rockets left the launch pad and soared high into the sky.

The sixth annual water rocket derby on April 21 brought more than 130 Cub Scouts from Cupertino, San Jose, Almaden and Santa Clara to West San Jose's Rainbow Park on Johnson Avenue to build and launch handmade soda bottle rockets.

At check-in, entrants were given a number and flight-time card, then sent to the next table for their rocket-building kit. Each kit held two cardboard tubes, a tube cap, a 20-ounce plastic soda bottle, fan-shaped cardboard for the nose cone and three thin cardboard fins, all contained in a blue plastic bag.

"We try to use as much recycled material as possible," said event founder and coordinator Wesley Wong.

Scouts were also provided with colored markers and stickers to decorate their high-flying object and as much tape as needed.

Wong, a San Jose resident for 15 years, came up with the idea for the water rocket derby about eight years ago when his son was a Cub Scout and Wong was the scoutmaster of Pack 328. Wong's co-worker at the time was also a science teacher who conducted a water rocket launching event for his students. Wong thought it was a great idea and decided to turn the concept into a Cub Scout event.

"It is a fun activity for the boys because if you keep the boys interested and having fun, then they will continue to be a part of the program," said Wong, whose favorite part of the day was watching the launch of the homemade rockets.

The event taught scouts about water and air pressure. The compressed air pumped into the soda bottle builds pressure inside of the rocket. When the air is released the pressure forces the rocket up into the air, according to the instruction booklet each child received.

When launched, rockets can reach heights up to 100 feet in the air, but contestants are not judged based on height. Official time of flight determines the winners in each of the four ranks in attendance: tigers, first-graders; wolves, second-graders; bears, third-graders and webelos, fourth- and fifth-graders. For each rank, a medal was given to the first-, second- and third-place winner with the best combined flight time.

"When the rocket goes up, we start the timer, and when it lands on the ground, we stop it. So it is total flight time," Wong said. Each participant was allowed three launches; the first two were timed and the last launch was just for fun, Wong said.

Each Cub Scout was also given a 2007 rocket derby patch and an orange Junior Rocketeer ribbon for participating.

West San Jose resident Alec Luttrell has three years of experience in Cub Scouts but was participating in his first water rocket derby. Taping the fins on the bottom of the rocket was the hardest part of the building process, Alec said.

Alec, 10, said he had some help from his mother in the building of his rocket, named



**Rocket Scientists:** Two young rocket scientists Adam Craubart, 7, (left) and Peter Martyn, 7, who are Tiger Cubs from West San Jose, stand in line ready to test their aerodynamic theories.



**Go Team!** Cheering the firing of the first round of rockets, Cub Scout Bobby Houston, 7, looks forward to an afternoon of fun competition trying to get the longest flying rocket on April 21 at Rainbow Park in West San Jose.



**Final Details:** Patrick Fox, 11, from West San Jose adds the finishing touches to his rocket before launch time. Last year, he came in second in the competition for having the longest flight. This year he was gunning for first place with the knowledge and experience he has gained.



**Blast Off:** Caught midair, a rocket fires off the launch pad at high speed. Paul Craig, 7, from West San Jose pulls the cord to set the high-pressure water rocket free. Don Lenkiewicz assists him while overseeing safety.

**Deathtrap.**

Alec's father couldn't be at the event but offered some good advice, which Alec made sure to follow. "You just have to tape it really tight so that all the pressure stays inside," Alec said.

Mitchell Morrison, 7, from Santa Clara, a Cub Scout for just one year, said building the rocket was easy.

"You insert the bottle first with the foam around it, and then you put the wings on," said Mitchell, of the building process.

The boys were encouraged to bring their parents to help with the rockets, Wong said. Mitchell's parents Alan and Lee came to help him with his rocket and take pictures of the launch. The derby promoted working together, Alan said, and Lee explained that part of the fun was seeing what others are doing to their rockets.

The hardest part for Saratoga resident Alexander Selway was making the cone for the top of his rocket. Alexander, 8, a

first-year Cub Scout, said making the rocket was harder than he thought.

He decorated his rocket with UFOs, planets and even some planets that he made up himself.

"It just popped into my mind," said Alexander, of the solar system drawn on his rocket with colored markers.

Alexander seemed more excited to launch the rocket than to build it.

"You get to see it fly up in the air and come down and hopefully not crash land," said Alexander, who can't wait to come back next year and build another one.

**First-place winners:**

- Tigers:** Peter Martyn (Pack 374) .....12.60 seconds
- Wolves:** Brendan Lin (Pack 453) .....12.43 seconds
- Bears:** Joshua Otani (Pack 327) .....12.77 seconds
- Webelos:** Tommy Jackson (Pack 577) .....11.89 seconds