

Vesperman Farms Featuring A-maze-ing Pumpkins

by Jeff Stiles

Kyle Vesperman's dog wanted all the attention during his master's interview last weekend. Fortunately, even over the sound of Reggie's barking and panting, Kyle was able to tell us all about this weekend's pumpkin festival at Vesperman Farms. This season the southwest Wisconsin attraction boasts an enlarged petting zoo, half a dozen challenging mazes for all ages, and a hay-wagon ride to a field that contains many more pumpkins than Lancaster has residents.

Weekender: First of all, how is your college degree going?

Kyle: My degree will be in ornamental horticulture with a minor in business and marketing. I'm working on finishing it up this next year.

Weekender: Do you get any college credit for the entrepreneurial work you do out here on the farm?

Kyle: No, although I did have an intern last summer who received credit for helping with marketing and promotions.

Weekender: Is the fact you don't have an intern this summer an indication your operation is becoming easier to run?

Kyle: It's actually getting harder, as we've become busier with more events and more groups visiting. I just didn't look for an intern this year, but in hindsight I probably should have!

Weekender: Did English designer Adrian Fisher once again design this year's corn maze?

Kyle: Yes, our maze is in the shape of a steamboat, which is playing off a river/nautical/maritime theme most of Adrian's mazes have this year. Apparently it's the 150th anniversary of England's greatest naval victory—Trafalgar—and to celebrate he's done designs of naval ships. I decided to make that theme fit with our area, and that's why I decided to go with a riverboat instead. After all, you don't see many ocean-going naval ships on the Mississippi River!

Weekender: Do you see people coming to your farm that have been through other Adrian Fisher mazes?

Kyle: I'm not sure if they've been

through other Adrian Fisher mazes, but the most consistent thing I hear people saying is that this is the first maze in which they've ever become lost. They say this maze is a whole lot bigger and more complex than any other mazes they've ever been in. I know it's hard to convince people that we are that way until they actually come out here and walk it and see what it's all about. Adrian Fisher is the best.

Weekender: You actually have additional mazes now other than the corn maze you've had for the past three years?

Kyle: Yes. We've also got a rope maze, which is a series of ropes that are intertwined. Participants start at the knot while wearing a belt that's attached to a rope, and they weave their way through the maze.

Everyone gets a different-colored rope, and they race their friends to see who can get back to the knot first. Then we've got our small but very challenging pallet maze, and behind that we have a miniature corn maze for kids who are 2-4 years old and don't want to walk through the big maze but want to see what it's like to walk through the corn. Those are things we're adding to improve the experience out here at Vesperman Farms.

Weekender: What's up with the new brickwork next to the barn?

Kyle: Last year we needed a suitable location to put up a tent for the food stand, so this past spring we hauled in about 20 truckloads of dirt to create a flat space. Instead of just leaving it as green grass, we decided to do something different and creative. Within the soil we laid in brick pavers to create a series of circles that form a labyrinth, which by definition is

one continuous winding path.

Weekender: Tell us about this weekend's pumpkin festival.

Kyle: Along with the hay rides and maze, this Saturday the Lancaster Jaycees will be having a pumpkin decorating contest starting at 10:30 a.m., with judging at noon. There will also be a bake sale. WGLR will be out here in the afternoon with prizes and giveaways and a live broadcast, and I'm hoping to have a group out here with a food stand to sell brats or sandwiches.

Weekender: After you graduate next year, will you continue with this endeavor?

Kyle: It's a little overwhelming right now to pull off both school and the maze, but I have a few plans for next summer that hopefully will expand this effort. Next year we'll also be offering pick-your-own strawberries to extend the season back into May or the beginning of June. The rest of the time we're just running the farm—raising the crops, watching the prices and all that fun stuff.



Kyle Vesperman

Weekender: And finally, why should tri-staters come out to visit Vesperman Farms this weekend?

Kyle: It is worth the trip just to take the hayride out to the pumpkin patch alone, to see the 6,000-7,000 pumpkins I estimate are out there. It's not only fun family entertainment but it's also good exercise!

If you know of an especially interesting person who is involved with an upcoming weekend activity in the greater Platteville area, we'd love to consider them for our Up Close and Personal feature. You can contact editorial director Jeff Stiles by mailing him a postcard or emailing him at jeffstiles@wcinet.com.



Photo by Jeff Stiles

Kyle estimates there are 6,000-7,000 pumpkins of all sizes ready for the picking at Vesperman Farms.