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Rivals in the Cotton Bowl work together for charity

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*Students and alumni from Arkansas and Kansas State team up on a project for Mission Arlington.

ARLINGTON - It may run counter to nature, but Razorbacks and Wildcats proved Thursday morning that they can get along, at least if it's for a good cause.

A day before their football teams each hoped to destroy the other in the AT&T Cotton Bowl Classic at Cowboys Stadium, more than 100 students and alumni from the University of Arkansas and Kansas State University gathered for a joint community service project at Mission Arlington.

In their first task, Razorbacks fans, clad in cardinal red, and Wildcats faithful, dressed in royal purple, formed a human chain to help transport donations as Mission Arlington began preparing for its 2012 Christmas store. Last year's store distributed toys to 35,000 low-income children, some of whom are still so enamored with their new bicycles that they forget to attend Bible study, Executive Director Tillie Burgin said.

Even the mascots helped, though Willie the Wildcat was both outmanned by Big Red, Sue E and Pork Chop and outsized by Boss Hogg, a student wearing a 9-foot-tall inflatable costume.

"Size does matter in mascots, we think," joked John Diamond, Arkansas' associate vice chancellor for university relations.

K-State was invited to the event by Arkansas, which got the idea last year when it played Ohio State in the Sugar Bowl. The Buckeyes asked the Hogs to work with them on a community project in New Orleans, Arkansas Chancellor G. David Gearhart said.

"Bowl games are exciting and fun, but we think it's important to give back to the community that hosts us for a few days," he said. "It's something we hope to continue to do."

Kansas State officials also expect to make such projects part of future bowl activities, officials said.

Gearhart kicked off the good-natured trash-talking, telling the crowd that although the two universities were there to work together, "We'll let Kansas State win the competition today, and then we'll win the competition tomorrow."

Both universities have large concentrations of alumni in Dallas-Fort Worth, so finding participants with local ties was easy.

Like Gearhart, Meredith Weaver of Coppell, a sophomore on the Arkansas dance team, predicted a Hogs victory. But win or lose, she is happy that the game is taking place so close to home.

"The rest of my team is staying in a hotel, but I'm getting to spend time with my family," she said.

Wildcats supporters, meanwhile, rejected the talk that their boys will suffer defeat.

"Kansas State is going to win by seven," President Kirk Schulz said, adding that, as is his custom, he will reveal his score prediction this morning. "It's going to be a great game."

Alumnus Kip Hanzlicek, who lives in Frisco and owns a business in Dallas, was similarly confident but less specific.

"We're going to win," the father of a recent K-State graduate promised.

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