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Kite fighting brings Afghan culture, tradition to MSU

By [KRISTI JOURDAN](#)

The State News

Kites of all sizes swished and swooped through the air trying to slice each other's strings and send them spiraling out of control toward the ground on Friday.

Approximately 500 people attended the kite fighting event at Munn field on Friday evening, which was held in recognition of Khaled Hosseini's book, "The Kite Runner" - this fall's featured novel in the One Book, One Community program.

Kite fighting is a sport in Afghanistan and featured in Hosseini's novel. It involves two or more kites that have their strings lined with glue and crushed glass. Once the kites are up in the air, opponents try to swoop in and cut each other's strings. The last kite flying is the winner. The kite runner is the person that finds the fallen kites.

"The author describes this so well," said Ami Van Antwerp, East Lansing's communications specialist for events and the Web. "It's an honor to be the last kite flying and to find the fallen kites because traditionally they fly really high. It's supposed to be tricky to find them.

"It sounds really fascinating, and it's so exciting to actually see this first hand."

Kite fighting demonstrations were held by Afghan teens who were brought to the United States through an exchange student program called Youth Exchange Study, or YES Afghanistan.

Many of the children who attended flew regular kites without glass.

Fifteen-year-old Arslan Muradi, originally from Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan, said he has been kite fighting since he was 7 years old. Muradi is an exchange student attending Woodland High School in New Haven, Ind.

"It's very popular," Muradi said. "When you cut someone else's string you get very happy. It's just fun."

East Lansing High School sophomore Naveed Zafari from Kabul, said the glass on the strings sometimes hurts his hands.

"The glass hurts if you don't know what you're doing," Zafari said. "You can't fly if the wind is really hard because it cuts your hands."

YES Afghanistan and Worldlink coordinator Terry Dougherty is responsible for finding the host families for the exchange students to live with and said he wants to get more people involved in the activity.

"This is an on-going state department program," he said. "We had 40 applicants this year and 40 last year. Next year we're looking to recruit more. These kids participate in events to share Afghan culture with Americans."

Dougherty learned how to fly kites when he was in Peace Corps training in 1973.

"When you're running the strings hard, they cut," he said while grinning and showing his bloodied hands. "It's the best sport."

The One Book, One Community program expanded into area elementary schools where kids made their own kites, Van Antwerp said.

East Lansing resident Hassan Salama, originally from El-Monoufia, Egypt, a city 40 miles from Cairo, brought his children, 9-year-old Rehab, 6-year-old Salma, 4-year-old Amanie and 3-year-old Nada to fly their kites.

They found out about the event from their school, Pinecrest Elementary, Salama said.

"We fly kites back home in Egypt," Hassan said. "We don't have kite fighting in our country. Kids fly kites just in the summer."

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Emanuel Davis-King, 9, of Lansing, flies his homemade kite at Munn field on Friday evening during "The Sky's the Limit" event hosted by the One Book, One Community program. Davis-King said he made the kite himself that day in his fourth-grade class at Red Cedar Elementary.

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