

Key Pen Parks Harvest Party is spooky fun

By Alice Kinerk, KP News

Offering festive fun for area residents, Key Pen Parks hosted another ghoulish good time at this year's Harvest Party, Oct. 18 at Volunteer Park.

Inside the picnic shelter, visitors danced to popular Halloween songs, illuminated by brightly colored strobe lights. A few feet away, a campfire was ringed by youngsters roasting marshmallows on long sticks. A park volunteer made sure all kids — as well as their highly flammable costumes — remained safely behind a spray-painted line. Elsewhere, an old-fashioned tractor decorated with scarecrows and hay bales made a cute backdrop for parents to snap photos.

In front of the park office, kids tested their bravery by sticking their hands inside a spooky-looking set of mystery touch boxes. Cool melon and slimy gel waited inside. Park volunteer Jerry Hartley was sitting at the end of

the table, ready to hand out candy to those brave enough to try.

Hartley, who's retired, has been volunteering in the community for the past six years. "I love volunteering with Key Pen Parks. I really like greeting kids and families," Hartley said.

Every eight or nine minutes, a tractor outfitted with a hay bale trailer rumbled into the parking lot and picked up a group for a dark and bumpy ride down the park trails and across the back field.

Not to be overlooked, of course, was the simple fun of playing on the Volunteer Park playground after dark. In a costume, surrounded by other kids.

The popular annual event drew folks from up and down the peninsula. Those disinclined to romp on the playground or bump across the back field sipped cocoa or apple cider and enjoyed watching the variety of creative costumes on display.

From infants riding in backpacks to grandmas chasing toddlers, most everyone was dressed up.

Costumes ranged from the scary: witches, vampires, zombies; to the funny: a hunter and a deer, a pint-sized Dracula, a Minecraft Creeper with a cube-shaped head that seemed to form a third of her total height.

There were at least a half-dozen classic superheroes, as well as other costumes inspired by popular movies or cartoons. In the costume contest, announced at the end of the night, a pair of identically dressed minions from the movie "Despicable Me" picked up the award for best pair.

The evening's sweet finale occurred after the costume contest prizes had all been announced and the pumpkin carving champions named. The gate to the field was then opened up and kids streamed in to lay claim to the goody bags laid here and there on the grass.

Volunteer Tara Trammel, dressed as an autumn sprite, stood at the gate reminding everyone to take only two goody bags each. Trammel kept a few bags set aside to make sure all kids went home with candy. "If you can't find two, come find me," she counseled the last few children entering the field.

So much fun doesn't come about without the dedicated work of folks at Key Pen Parks, as well as many volunteers. Key Pen Park Executive Director Scott Gallacher said the annual Harvest Party takes a significant amount of resources. "This is all hands on deck for us," said Gallacher, who even recruited his own two children to stuff goody bags.

All the hard work was appreciated by 5-year-old Lucy Watkinson, who checked out everything at the event and declared the hay ride her favorite. "I liked it because it was bumpy," Watkinson said.

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