

CHAT ROOM



JILL VANDORNICK

Keep Halloween simple and fun

I am a Halloween Scrooge. Halloween just isn't what it used to be.

Admittedly, saying things like that makes me feel old. Not that I'm willing to be old yet, but I am willing to be a Scrooge when it comes to Halloween.

What is it about Halloween that I don't like? I don't like front lawns decorated like graveyards, straw-stuffed decapitated people sitting on front porches and pumpkin lights strung across bushes. The gory, scary decorations just don't amuse me and they scare my children. As for those strands of pumpkin lights, they are just one more reminder of how Halloween has become a retailers' financial dream.

Too commercial

I don't begrudge stores from making money, but I don't need one more useless way to spend money.

I am not against trick or treating and costumes. I like that part of Halloween. Kids going door-to-door and loading up a pillowcase full of candy - that's fun. I don't even mind the teenagers at the door who are taller than me. I'd rather see them on Halloween night dressed up as a bum than see them throwing eggs on a car on Devil's night.

There again, though, the costumes aren't what they used to be when I was a kid. Of course, it's convenient to go to the store and buy something off the rack. Every grocery, clothing and craft store has racks of all sorts of costumes. Some costumes haven't changed over the years. They are made of paper-thin fabric and the selection is the typical duck, witch, ballerina and dog.

Expensive, fancy costumes

More and more, I see costumes that are thick enough to be a jacket. Instead of masks, there are hairpieces for girls and helmets for boys. Police helmets light up and fireman helmets make a siren sound. Very impressive and they cost more money.

Whatever happened to going through the closet and using some creativity? Last year my daughter came up with the idea of being a snowman. How that idea ever got into her 3-year-old mind baffled me. I was even more baffled about how she could be a snowman. No matter what we suggested, she still insisted on dressing up as a snowman.

On Oct. 31, finally convinced we could not talk her out of it, I started searching the closets. A white sweatshirt (turned inside out so the fuzzy part showed), white sweatpants, hat, mittens and shoes made up her costume. A Christmas gift bag with snowmen on it served as her trick or treat bag. Simple and absolutely precious. It also turned out to be a very practical outfit for a cool evening.

I am fairly certain she was the only snowman trick-or-treating in the city of Farmington, too. This year she's already said she wants to be a horse clown. When I figure out what that is, I'm sure I'll find something in the closet to make it work.

Despite having a mother who's a Halloween Scrooge, my children enjoy the night. They dress up in creative costumes they make up themselves and we decorate our house with cornstalks and pumpkins instead of tombstones.

My Halloween philosophy is pretty basic: let's not get carried away and remember what this tradition is really all about - the candy.

Jill Vandornick is a Farmington Hills resident and the mother of two young children.

Merchants lend a helping hand

BY MARY RODRIQUE
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"How can we help?"

That's the question Kathleen Donnelly most often hears when she calls the Farmington Dollar Castle store and talks to Ron Kattoula, director of operations, or Eddie Denha, president.

"They've been wonderful," said Donnelly, founder of Sweet Dreamzzz, a local charity that makes Christmas brighter for children in several Detroit elementary schools. "I don't recall dealing with merchants as accommodating as these guys."

The Dollar Castle opened in the downtown Farmington center just over a year ago, and Donnelly wasn't shy about asking the new shopkeepers in town for help.

"We love their concept," said Denha, who oversees 16 Dollar Castle stores in metro Detroit and Lansing. "They're mothers helping children. We love to help out kids, especially around the holidays."

Sweet Dreamzzz

Donnelly formed Sweet Dreamzzz a few years ago with a group of friends, primarily other Farmington Hills moms with young children. They began by adopting an elementary school for the holidays, providing each child with a new sleeping bag, pillow, toothbrush - everything necessary for a good night's sleep, plus a few extra goodies. The effort has grown each year.

"Last December, I got calls from other schools looking for any leftovers. I called Dollar Castle and asked for 600 hats and 600 pair of mittens. They said 'Of course, no problem.'"

This December, Sweet Dreamzzz is providing a Christmas party with all the trimmings for children in six elementary schools in southwest Detroit. That's 3,000 kids.

"I called (Dollar Castle) this summer to forewarn them," Donnelly said. "Ron said, 'I believe we are put on earth to help each other. We'll support you.'"

The Dollar Castle is a large, brightly lit store that sells a wide variety of goods, from canned foods to bingo dabbers to birthday cards. Everything for a buck. Because of the reasonable prices, Sweet Dreamzzz did a lot of shopping there last year for the holiday parties, primarily winter hats, gloves and mittens for the kids.

"They buy \$3,000 (worth), we give them the first \$1,200," explained Denha. "They bought a variety of things, but the majority was hats and gloves."

Added Kattoula: "We try to help out as much as we can."

School band benefits and church fund-raisers have also been the beneficiary of their generosity.

"Back in March, Kathleen contacted us about the need for storage space," said Denha. "She didn't have space to store all the items. We agreed to help. We have 20,000 square feet (warehouse) in Hazel Park."

Hosts fundraiser

Earlier this year, the Dollar Castle also agreed to play host to a Sweet Dreamzzz benefit whereby the group brought in an interior designer to hold a workshop in the store, showing how Dollar Castle items could be used to decorate or for gift items. Denha and Kattoula pledged 10 percent of proceeds, or no less than \$300 to Sweet Dreamzzz.

Denha bought his first Dollar Castle store in Ferndale in 1992. The West Bloomfield resident has added new stores gradually over the past nine years.

Kattoula, of Farmington Hills, has a philosophy about helping.

"It's the best way to meet the right people in a community," he said. "For Denha, supporting charities was a concept grasped early in life."

"My parents instilled in us since we were kids the importance of giving back to the community."

The Dollar Castle works closely with the Detroit Police and other departments as well as churches in the area, from Farmington to Southfield to Oak Park. It has supplied goods for block parties. Just after the terrorist attacks



Offering help: Ron Kattoula and Eddie Denha of the Dollar Castle store have supported Sweet Dreamzzz and other local charitable efforts since coming to Farmington last year.

on the World Trade Center last month, the Dollar Castle donated cases of water and batteries to the relief effort. The goods were transported by a group of Oakland County law enforcement officers.

"We love this community and are glad to be a part of it," said Denha. Added Kattoula:

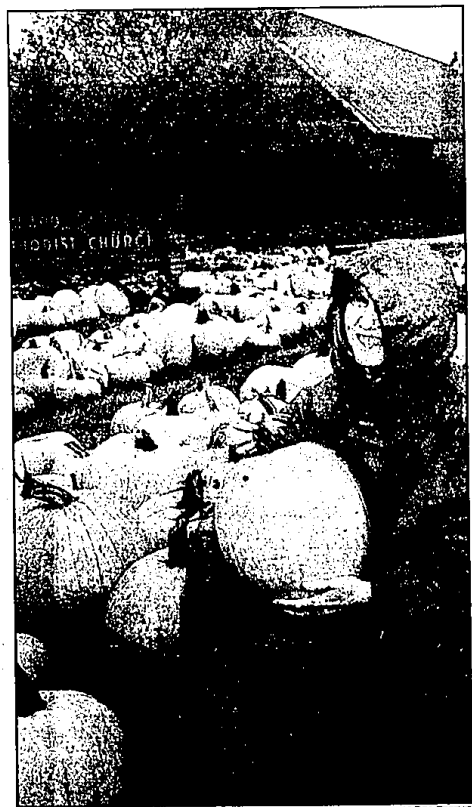
"We also serve a purpose. We're rea-

sonable in price, very competitive with low market prices."

Dollar Castle store hours are 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Sundays.

For more information about Sweet Dreamzzz, call (248) 478-3242. The organization has an office at 31691 Grand River, west of Orchard Lake Road.

Pumpkin fever



Fine specimen: Ruth Buckwalter holds a perfect pumpkin, one of many now on sale through Halloween at Orchard United Methodist's annual sale to benefit youth group programs. Hours are 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily. The church is at 30450 Farmington Road, north of 13 Mile Road. The pumpkins were grown by Navaho Indians in New Mexico.

Nardin Park honors preschool director

BY MARY RODRIQUE
STAFF WRITER

Newly retired nursery school teacher Judy Turnquist never knows when she'll run into one of her former students.

It's happened when she's tuned into Channel 7 news and seen reporter Heather Catallo. On the football field at Harrison High School. In the supermarket. Almost everywhere she goes in Farmington Hills, there is the grown-up version of a youngster she led in classroom games and songs years earlier at Nardin Park United Methodist Church.

"My impressions of her is that she was really warm and kind, just the type of person you'd expect to be teaching nursery school," said Catallo, a special projects reporter at WXYZ-TV.

"My sister Katie and I both went there. My mom kept in touch with her. I still have the Christmas ornaments I made in preschool."

On Saturday, Oct. 27, Nardin Park will host a retirement party for Turnquist, who left after 22 years teaching and directing the ecumenical community program for 3 and 4-year-olds.

"When Judy said she was retiring, it was a shock to me and others," said Paula Williams, president of the nursery school board, comprised of parents with children in the program.

"She was the center of this program. She directed and was involved in so many kids' lives. It was her home away from home."

Nardin Park Church launched its nursery school program 30 years ago as community outreach. While the classrooms are housed in the sprawling church building on 11 Mile west of Middlebelt, the program is not under the direction of the church.

"It's owned and operated by parents who have kids in the program," said Turnquist. "Parents are involved in the administration, but teachers run the classroom."

Three-year-olds meet two days a week, morning or afternoon. Four-year-olds have a three day a week program, also half day sessions. About seven years ago, an enrichment class for 4 1/2-year-olds was added, which could run five half day sessions a week, depending on demand.

"It was our answer to Farmington



Retiring: Judy Turnquist visits a class at Nardin Park preschool.

discontinuing developmental kindergarten," said Turnquist. "It's for kids who could benefit from additional support."

Found her niche

A Farmington Hills resident for 30 years, Turnquist is married and the mother of three adult children. She has five grandchildren. She started her professional career as a kindergarten teacher in Livonia, but joined the nursery school operation 22 years ago. She soon found she had discovered her niche.

"Last year I was teaching class when a girl in the office said I had a visitor," Turnquist recalls. "It was a 21-year-old Oakland University student named Kelly. She was driving by and wondered if I was still teaching here. She just wanted to say hello. And you know what? I remembered her."

It's those visits from former students that put a sparkle in her eye. She says she remembers many of them, too.

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