

Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation Fact Sheet for Friends Groups—Halloween

Leaves start to change color, days become cooler and the smell of pumpkin wafts through open windows. Autumn has arrived in Pennsylvania! And what else is there to look forward to this season besides apple harvests and pumpkin picking? Halloween, of course!

However, celebrating Halloween and trick-or-treating in congested neighborhoods can be dangerous, and many times there are not enough safe areas for children to show off their costumes and grab as much candy as they can carry. Luckily, many friends groups have solved this problem by putting together their own fall and Halloween festivities! This is a fantastic way of offering family-friendly Halloween fun for your community, as well as getting people to your park during the off-season. This fact sheet, compiled with the help of some of our friends groups, will give you some ideas on how your group can get started in hosting your very own fall festival.

Location. Friends at Prince Gallitzin and Pymatuning state parks utilize their campgrounds for their Halloween in the Park and Spooktacular trick-or-treating events, and this seems to be one of the most popular and easily managed locations. Campsites typically fill up during this time, as campers love to be involved in decorating their campsites and handing out candy. (See *Trick or Treating* section below.) Large picnic areas would also be good locations for other activities at the festival. Remember to reach out to your park manager or district



Campers just might go over the top with their decorations!
Photo: Pymatuning Boo Crew

forester to organize the date, time and locations for the event.

Promoting. Getting the word out about your event is crucial, so be sure to reach out to your local newspaper, radio station, and businesses in the area. Hand out flyers, post the event on the park's, DCNR's, and your websites and posting on Facebook will

also help boost awareness of the event. Some newspapers will post nonprofit events for free, so become familiar with your local media.



There's just something about Halloween.
Photo: Pymatuning Boo Crew

Volunteers. A common theme between planning and hosting a fall festival is coordination between the staff and the volunteers. This will be a dual effort and cooperation must be utilized for the success of your festival. The Friends of Pine Grove Furnace bring in volunteers from other parks and organizations to help with parking, and all volunteers wear a bright orange volunteer shirt. This is very helpful for visitors who may have questions or need assistance, so they can easily spot a volunteer if they need one. The Friends of Pine Grove Furnace coordinate with their park staff on safety and security and always have a park staff member on the hay wagons for their hay rides. The Friends of Pinchot also volunteer as safety and security during their park's

Pinchotween, a camper specific event that offers trick-or-treating in their campground.

Organizing your volunteers and making sure they are being utilized to their full potential is important. The Pymatuning group started a schedule for volunteers in 2014, indicating who was to be where in different time slots. This maximizes efficiency and helps keep everyone organized. It also prevents having only a few people from doing too much, and too many people from doing too little. Remember, throwing a bigger fall festival will take A LOT of work, so you may want to start out small and work your way up to a larger event. Some ideas to start out small would be hosting a pumpkin float, trick-or-treat in the campground, or even a Halloween-themed 5k or fun run.

Activities and Exhibits. The best part about Halloween is all of the creative outlets available to you! Hayrides, trick-or-treating, pumpkin floats, costume parades and kids crafts are just a few of many activities you can offer during the day. Having vendors and exhibits are also some ideas to consider. All of these activities can be offered with a small donation by festival-goers to help generate some profit. Here are some ideas for activities, some of which our Friends groups offer:

- Pumpkin carving/painting/float
- Kids' activities
- Pine cone bird feeders (Pinchot)
- Halloween-themed scavenger hunt (Pinchot)
- "Footprint ghosts" on black construction paper



There are all kinds of things the kids (and adults) can make.
Photo: Pymatuning Boo Crew

- Scarecrow making (Pine Grove Furnace Fall Furnace Festival)
- Costume contest (Pinchot)
- Parade (Prince Gallitzin)
- Campsite decorating contest (Pinchot, Prince Gallitzin)
- Trick-or-treating (Prince Gallitzin, Pymatuning)
- Slingshot Apples (Pymatuning)
- Hayrides (Pine Grove

Furnace Fall Furnace Festival, Parker Dam)

- Haunted trails (themed fun run or 5k)
- Educational Programs (Pine Grove Furnace Fall Furnace Festival)
- Historical demos
- Food demos (apple sauce/cider making)
- Falconry demos
- Food vendors or a concession stand
- Hot beverage station (cocoa, hot apple cider, coffee, tea)



A costume contest will bring out the creative spirit in your participants.
Photo: Pinchot State Park

- Exhibitor area (ASPCA, local non-profit organizations, etc.)

Food and entertainment will be important, so be sure you reach out to food vendors (if you choose to go that route) in advance. You may even choose to prepare your own food, or even see if there are local food trucks that would be interested in vending. The Friends of Pine Grove Furnace have local musicians play live music during their Fall Furnace Festival, which also helps in making announcements and coordinating volunteers. If you go the live entertainment route, be sure you have the proper audio equipment, such as speakers and microphones.

Trick or Treating. Determine how long you want your event to run—we have groups doing single day events to multi-weekend events! Volunteers and campers can bring candy, snack bags of chips or pretzels, or make up little gift bags to hand out to trick-or-treaters. Plan to have a designated time for trick-or-treating, and use the campground area where the decorated campsites are. This will keep everyone in one location and reduce the potential of wandering children. Keep in mind that there should be little to no vehicular traffic in the campground during this time. Parking lots and overflow parking should be located in their own area away from campsites. And if you offer hayrides, having a designated trick-or-treat area will help children not accidentally wander into dangerous



Bonfires might be a Halloween necessity
Photo: Pinchot State Park

territory. The Friends of Pine Grove Furnace make sure they have plenty of signs available to help direct visitors along with a printed map of where everything at the festival is located.

Some friends groups choose to have their Halloween event be more campground and camper specific, as Gifford Pinchot State Park staff and friends group do. They have trick-or-treating, a campsite decorating contest and a costume contest at their campground, specifically for their end-of-season campers. For the costume contest they have categories so even adults and groups can feel included. After trick-or-treating, they announce the contest winners and have a bonfire on the beach, with a table of donated food and snack items.

The Friends of Prince Gallitzin follow this model as well, while the Friends of Parker Dam have concentrated their considerably successful efforts on a Haunted Hayride event specifically as a “haunted house” type two-night spook-a-thon.

Donations and Vendors. Reach out to local businesses and organizations a couple of months prior to the event to collect donations or offer some kind of sponsorship benefit, such an advertisement page in the event program. Remember to keep track of who donated items and what they were, and don’t forget to send out thank-you letters to your donors! Donated items can be used for prizes, or you might hold a raffle as a fundraiser. (Be sure to follow the *PPFF Policy for Fundraising Raffles* and to



You just may find hidden talents in your group, too.
Photo: Stephanie Miller

have your raffle permit in place before conducting a raffle) or a silent auction items.

Decorations. Sometimes Halloween-themed decorations and events scare people, especially young people, a little too much. So consider encouraging campers to decorate their campsite, in a family-friendly way. Establish guidelines about what is appropriate and what is not. Stringing decorative lights throughout the trees and event areas will add a soft, spooky glow and doubles as lighting but be sure to have plenty of light-up decorations on hand, glow-sticks, or any other kind of battery-operated light source.

Here are some ideas of where you can find relatively inexpensive decorations:

- Party City—www.partycity.com
- Oriental Trading Company—
www.orientaltrading.com
- Wholesale party supply stores—
www.wholesalepartysupplies.com
www.partypro.com/bulk-party-supplies.html
www.dollardays.com/wholesale-party-supplies.html
- Spirit Halloween stores—
www.spirithalloween.com



Family friendly decorations keep the anxiety level low.
Photo: Friends of Pine Grove Furnace

- Target or Walmart
- Dollar General/Family Dollar/Five Below, etc.



Everyone loves a costume contest.
Photo: Pymatuning Boo Crew

For DIY crafts, themed baked goods and decorations, Pinterest is a wonderful resource to find easy, inexpensive holiday ideas
www.pinterest.com

Family Circle Magazine also has great craft ideas during the holidays
www.familycircle.com

Friends Group Resources:

- Friends of Codorus—717.630.2183
- Friends of Lyman Run—814.435.2518
- Friends of Parker Dam— 814.371.5428
- Friends of Pine Grove Furnace—717.787.3350
- Friends of Prince Gallitzin—814.684.4097
- Pymatuning Boo Crew—724.659.3796

Reminders

- If you hold a raffle as a fundraiser, be sure to follow the *PPFF Policy for Fundraising Raffles* and to have your raffle permit in place before conducting the raffle.
- If you plan to have vendors on site selling their own goods, please be sure to obtain their sales tax identification numbers in accordance with the *Vendor List—Sales Tax ID Tracker*.