

Pumpkin Fest going on hiatus

LAURA DENON
STAFF WRITER

Silvermont's Pumpkin Fest is taking a year-long hiatus in 2024 to permit the roughly dozen or so volunteers who lead the annual October festival time to rest and regroup.

"After every Pumpkin Fest we have a review meeting," said Erik Rasmussen, who stepped down last month as board president for the non-profit organization Friends of Silvermont but continues to serve as a board member.

"The common theme in those meetings tends to be: 'Wait, we can't keep doing that ... we can't keep doing it like this,' he said. 'We want to make sure that as an event and as an organization it doesn't start to wither and die with the older folks who have it in their head how we do this every year.'"

Pumpkin Fest is run by a core dozen volunteers who are retirees in their 60s, 70s and 80s, said Rasmussen.

Last year, the festival was held every weekend in October.

It used more than 300 volunteers including local high school and Schenck Job Corp students.

There were live music performances, food trucks, corporate sponsors, theatrical actors, light and sound shows and dozens of pumpkin displays. More than 5,000 people attended with about 40% visiting from outside the county.

Pumpkin Fest has been held annually since 2015 (except 2020) and is Friends of Silvermont's largest fundraiser. The 2023 festival raised the most funds bringing in about

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Former president, Friends of Silvermont

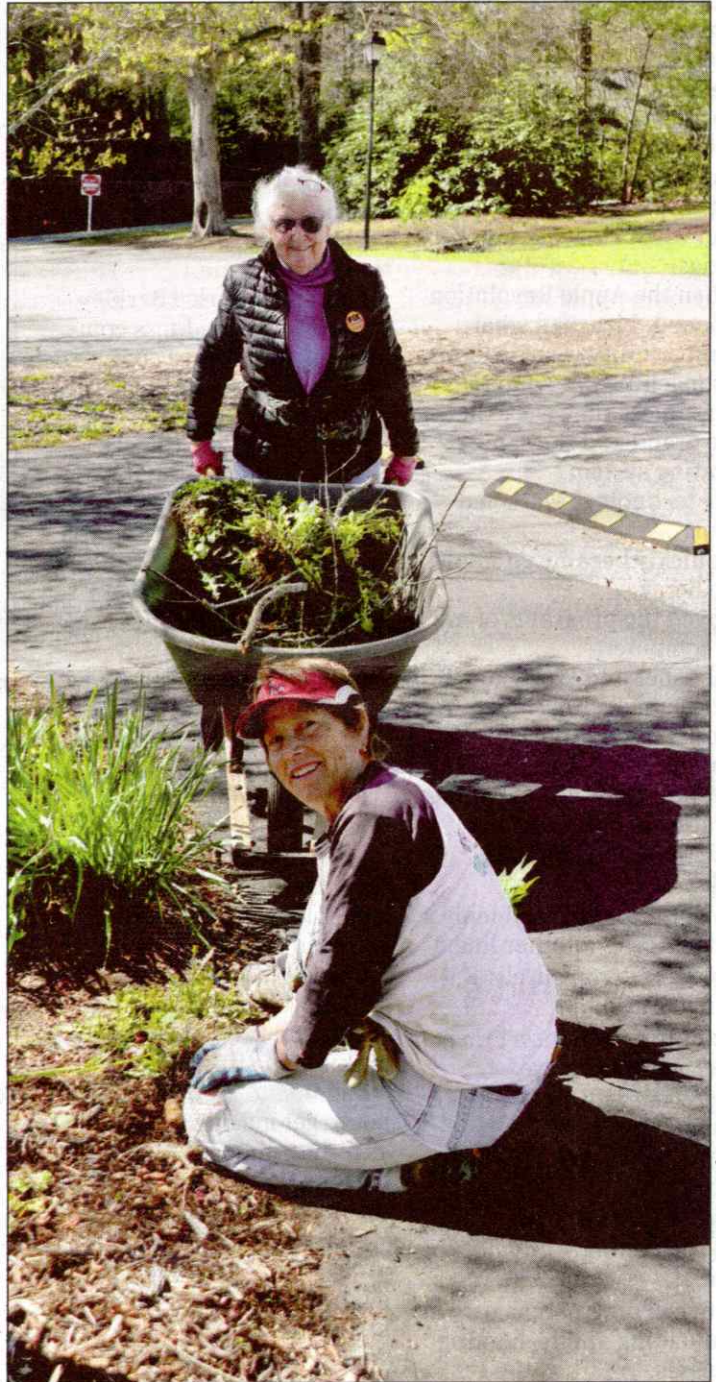
\$53,000.

While the county owns Silvermont mansion and the nonprofit organization Heart of Brevard runs the annual one-day Halloweenfest, Pumpkin Fest is volunteer run. The Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority provided a \$4,000 grant for last year's festival.

"We're looking at each of the displays if there are efficiencies — if there are things we can do in this gap year — to redesign the display," said Rasmussen. "It may be as simple as swapping the direction in which we run the lights inside some of the displays so that we can plug them up at the bottom of the display instead of at the top which eliminates having to put people on ladders."

Rasmussen brings plenty of expertise in management to the organization.

He managed a Navy engineering department providing strategic planning, organization, project and personnel management retiring as a civilian after serving 34 years. He has a doctorate in systems engineering and taught courses in engineering



Laura Denon | Transylvania Times

Nancy Knights (front) and Pinkie Byrd were two of the nine volunteers who worked cleaning up Silvermont park Saturday during the nonprofit organization Friends of Silvermont's most recent clean-up day.

PUMPKIN

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management.

"It really is looking at all the processes and trying to figure out where are the inefficiencies making enough documentation that we can convey the nuances of how these things are done," said Rasmussen. "We really need to simplify, standardize and document how we do that. That'll pay dividends in terms of not burning out."

Board member Chet Wright has a master's degree in theatre and retired following a career as a technical writer for defense contractors and is familiar with documenting procedures.

"We're doing a top to bottom review of the entire event," said Wright. "We're looking at everything that we do. We're looking at publicity. We're looking at volunteer coordination. And probably the biggest chunk of it, of course, is what we call the operations piece which is the set-up and running of the event."

For example, Wright said, in 2025 the organization will schedule three weeks to move all of the stored event props and items from Transylvania County Airport's hangar adding an extra week to the heavy process. This will permit younger volunteers who attend school and work weekdays to help more during the weekends.

"We recognize it's disappointing," said Wright about this year's cancellation. "It'll be disappointing to folks who've been looking forward to it as it has become a tradition."

Wright said while plans have not been ironed out yet, Friends of Silvermont volunteers hope to provide museum tours, children's games and the white squirrel

rel scavenger hunt during daylight hours at 2024's Halloweenfest.

"We want to get the word out early because people do make plans to come to it," said Rasmussen. "Believe me, we want to do it and we want to keep doing it, that's the goal."

"It won't affect the level of work or support we're giving Silvermont right now," he added. "We brought in about 45% more money last year than we did the year before so that enabled us to have this gap year."

ABOUT FRIENDS OF SILVERMONT

Friends of Silvermont was founded in 1981 in response to a recommendation by a committee of the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners to demolish the historic Silvermont mansion which was built in 1917.

Silvermont was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981.

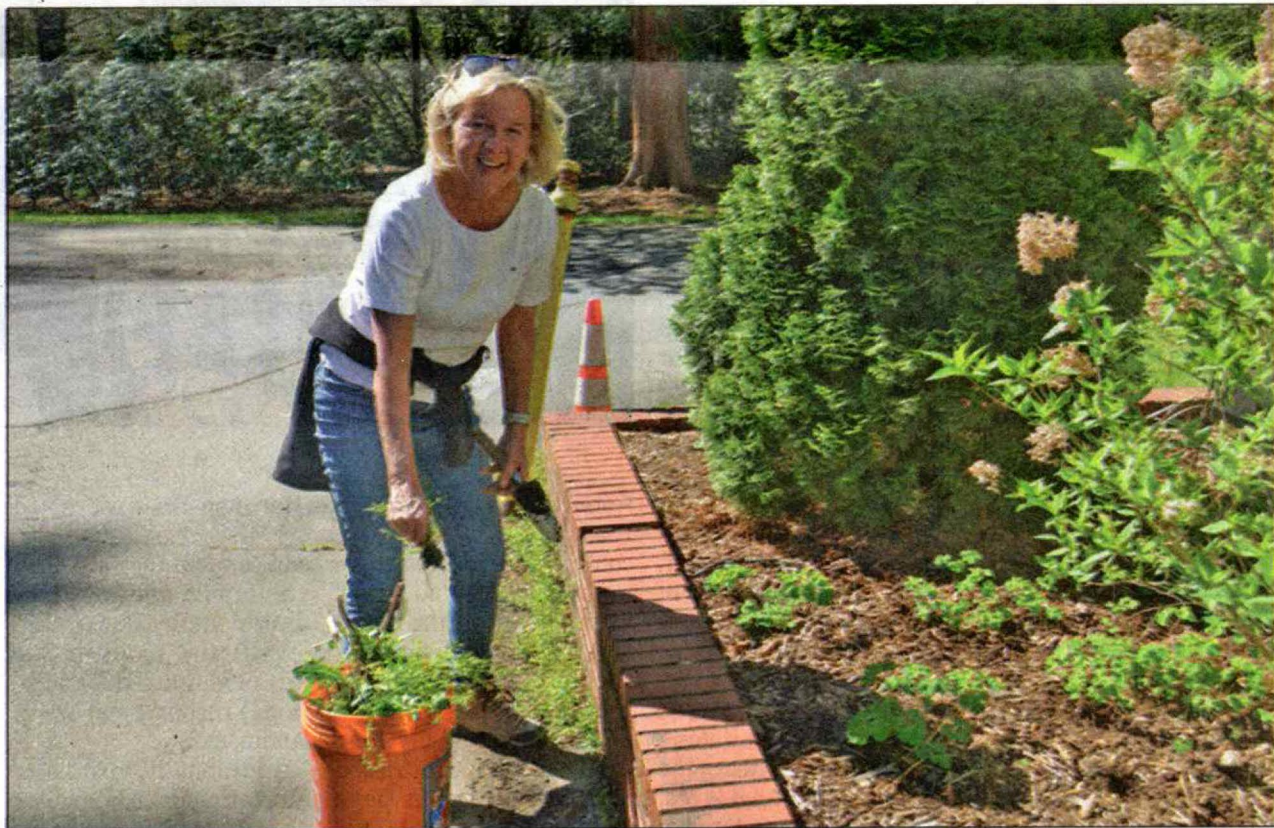
In 1982, the first floor was opened to the public. Today it serves as the county's senior center.

In 2011 the second floor was opened up as a museum which is currently operated by the Transylvania Heritage Museum.

Since 2013, the Friends of Silvermont has provided exterior painting, window replacing, walking trails, a playground, care for trees and flowers, removal of invasive plant species, among other improvements.

For more information, including how to volunteer and become a board member, visit the Friends of Silvermont website at silvermont.org.

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Submitted photos

Fran Rasmussen removes weeds from a flower bed in front of Silvermont mansion.



Fred Schenberg removes dandelions and other invasive weeds from a flower bed in Silvermont park.