

VOLUNTEERS MAKE PUMPKIN FEST HAPPEN

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FOR THE T. TIMES

Halloween night returns Friday but Pumpkin Fest Brevard 2025 is a wrap.

Pumpkin Fest is a volunteer-led fundraiser held over four weekends in October to help improve and maintain Silvermont Park and the historic mansion, which also serves as the county Senior Center.

The volunteer team is now working on cleanup and move-out from Silvermont Park to a storage facility.

If you were lucky enough to visit Pumpkin Fest this year, or volunteer to help, this is what you would may have heard during the event: Joyous shouts from children: "I found another white squirrel," "I got to dress up like a princess" or "Look at my face painting!" From the adults we heard: "This is the best year ever," "The music and food were great!" and "I learned so much from the museum tour."

One of the best stories this year heard from our volunteers is that of a former Pumpkin Fest "little white squirrel" from 2016-17, Annslee Small, now in high school. She previously volunteered with her Aunt Hannah Small (our White Squirrel those years) and her cousin, Nadia Small. This year

Annslee volunteered during set up. She said when she was little she couldn't wait to get into high school so she could volunteer to help with Pumpkin Fest.

While the event nights are over, there is still work to be

done. Move-out takes four to five days to protect displays during the move and make sure all electrical cords and displays are labeled and stowed safely. Next is a team evaluation of what worked well and what

can be improved. Next is building a list of tasks to do before our next move-in, items like repairs of broken pumpkins or displays, and scheduling team



Submitted photo

Pictured are team members Joe Dapkins, Bruce Hill, Kristen Alpert, Chet Wright, Ruth Wright, Annslee Small (a volunteer), Jenny Tierney and Pinkie Byrd. Team members missing from the photo include Jeanne Hunter, Maury Bandurraga, John McGinnis, Mary McGinnis and Jeff

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time to work on these at our storage facility. We also clean all the costumes and go through all of our equipment (radios, tables, chairs, tents) to make sure it is all ready for next year.

After taking a short break we start planning for the next Pumpkin Fest. To do this event sustainably, we need to recruit more Pumpkin Fest core team members in addition to helpers on move-in, event nights and move-out. As our leadership ages, we are not able to do the same physical work as 10 years ago and we need team members to lead our other volunteers. To keep this going, we need your help. Please contact pumpkinfestbrevard@gmail.com if you are interested in getting involved with the Pumpkin Fest team. There are all kinds of jobs, big and small, and we definitely need more help to keep Pumpkin Fest alive in the future.

Many noticed we took 2024 off last year (very fortunate in avoiding Helene damage to the displays) to regroup and rethink our processes of setting up, running the event and moving out.

The displays are huge and heavy. The carved, lit Styrofoam pumpkins are fragile, and the volunteer leadership group was getting older and burnt out after eight years of the event. Since 2023 some leaders have left, others have joined and many things have changed to make the whole process easier. Move-in started a week earlier and a lot of the heavy work was moved to the weekends when we could get help from the MCJROTC group from Brevard and Rosman high schools and other younger volunteers.

"It was so much easier to move in compared to past years, and if we had a rainy day, we could take the day off and not worry about getting the event set up in time for opening night," said Joe Dapkins, leader of the Pumpkin Fest team and vice president

of Friends of Silvermont. "Our 'Process Reinvention' team, led by Chet and Ruth Wright, really made a huge difference. Set-ups from 2023 were better documented, labeled and stored, so they were much easier to do."

Ruth Wright, also our volunteer coordinator, re-envisioned the sign-up process, switching to Sign Up Genius, so everyone can see which volunteer roles are available and which fit their physical abilities and interests.

As always when setting up the Pumpkin Fest team tweaks existing exhibits and lighting to improve their visual impact. In addition to his head parking responsibilities, Dapkins has added music to several of the displays to help evoke the moods of the "White Squirrel Circus," "Pirates Cove" and "Rainforest." This year Jeanne Hunter, the Pumpkin Fest designer, added jellyfish and a large reflective school of fish to the "Under the Sea" exhibit to enhance the beauty of the exhibit. She also coordinates the music line up.

Most on the Pumpkin Fest Team wear multiple hats. Other key leaders include Pinkie Byrd (president of FOS and coordinator for museum tours and mansion activities); Kristen Alpert (treasurer and rebuilder of the ghostly circle); Jeff Koontz (both publicity, and other roles); Mary McGinnis and Jenny Tierney (both many roles, varying each night). We also thank Michael Rosenthal who organized all our food trucks this year.

We couldn't put on the event without the hundreds of Pumpkin Fest volunteers. More than 250 people helped this year, including many high school groups: Brevard Thespians, who are wonderful trail actors and face painters; Brevard and Rosman High National Honor Societies and MCJROTC, and the BHS Interact club.

Community groups that helped include Docents from the Transylvania Heritage Museum, led by Program Director Rebecca Suddeth; Brevard AAUW (who helped establish the

second-floor museum through Lee Stewart's leadership), Brevard College and Brevard Rotary. We appreciate every single volunteer that helped us, and hope that more organizations and individuals will partner with us in the future. Please reach out to pfestvolsbrvd@gmail.com if you'd like to get future notices about Pumpkin Fest work days or needs.

This year has been great for attendance, thanks to good weather and our best ever year in terms of local sponsorships with almost double the event night and music night sponsors compared to Pumpkin Fest 2023. The sponsors' financial support allows the Pumpkin Fest team to keep the admission cost low.

Since 2023, admission is \$7/adult (13 and over), \$5 for children (3-12), and free for under three. Before that for seven years, it was \$5 for everyone over 3. Sponsorship also helps reach the goals of maintaining and improving Silvermont Park and historic mansion. Please say a big thank you to all the organizations and local businesses who have helped Pumpkin Fest so much this year. We also appreciate the hard work done by Erik Rasmussen and John McGinnis to lead the sponsorship program.

Event night sponsors this year include Brevard Music Center and Quixote (both return sponsors), Platt, Water Oak Dental, and Headwaters Outfitters.

Music night sponsors include Brevard Rotary, TC Furnishings and Design, Chase Insurance Group and the Bandurraga and Dapkins, John and Mary McGinnis, and Rasmussen and Hunter families. Brevard Rotary also sponsored 20 free admissions for children on the opening night, Oct. 3. Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority awarded a grant to help with publicity to draw in visitors from South Carolina and other areas outside Transylvania County.

Maury Melanie Bandurraga is the publicity chair for the Pumpkin Fest Team.