

Hotels, community groups offer special Halloween



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(Photo: Danny Damiani/Post-Crescent Media)

GRAND CHUTE — A variety of community groups made Halloween come early for some Fox Valley kids who might not otherwise have the chance to get their share of tricks and treats.

Country Inn & Suites held its seventh annual Great Country Pumpkin Party on Thursday, which offered games, pizza and trick-or-treating for special needs children and their families.

Ashley Grove, assistant general manager for the hotel, said it's among her favorite days of the year.

"To see the happiness on the kids' faces — it means everything," she said.

It was the biggest event to date, and presented a wonderful problem as the number of sponsors outgrew their available space. To provide a solution, Hampton Inn, located across the parking lot, offered a wing of its rooms for costumed young ones to enjoy.

Families, community groups and businesses decorated and ran the trick-or-treat stations.

Some used black lighting, bats, witches and other spooky sights of the season. Some went with a light-hearted touch. There was even a room with the popular cartoon Minions and another occupied by video game characters Mario and Luigi.

"My favorite was the police officer's room," said 10-year-old Sydney Olson.

The Outagamie County Sheriff's Department put yellow police tape at the top of the door and blue and red squad lights flashed onto the walls inside.

A variety of mascots were there to greet the children as they arrived, including Fang from the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers who donned a Dracula-style cape.

Students from Appleton's Renaissance School for the Arts took portraits of the trick-or-treaters and there were goodie bags, prizes and a variety of carnival-style games.

"I'm having just as much fun as anyone," said Jackie Kruetzberg, who handed out candy.

The Grand Chute Fire Department parked one of its trucks outside the hotel for the children to explore. Country Inn created a spooky setting with cobwebs on its bannister and picture frames. A large full moon was projected high on its lobby wall.

It meant as much to parents as it did for their kids.

Breanne Dehart guided her 4-year-old son Zayden's wheelchair from room to room. He has cerebral palsy, and clad as a pirate, left with a sizable cache of sweet treasure. Dehart, an employee of Country Inn, was impressed by the event.

"It think it's amazing," she said.

Menasha resident Tim Siegel said the youngsters have a blast, and it's always a nice opportunity to reconnect with friends.

His daughter, Sarah, has Cornelia de Lange syndrome, and arrived with one of the more creative costumes. The 18-year-old had purple balloons attached to her purple clothing, leaving her well disguised as a bunch of grapes.

Siegel said he's most impressed by the number and variety of groups that come together to make a special Halloween happen for their children.

"Our community is just awesome," Siegel said. "It's so good to see the support for special needs kids."

Jim Collar: 920-993-1000, ext. 216, or jcollar@postcrescent.com (mailto:jcollar@postcrescent.com); on Twitter @JimCollar

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