

Pick of the patch

Story by
Karen Mansfield

*The Houston Pumpkin
Festival has grown
into a Southwestern
Pennsylvania
tradition*



In "It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown," Linus, hoping that the Great Pumpkin visits his pumpkin patch on Halloween,

says, "He's gotta pick this one. I don't see how a pumpkin patch can be more sincere than this one. You can look around here and there's not a sign of hypocrisy. Nothing but sincerity as far as the eye can see."

The Houston Pumpkin Festival is a lot like Linus and his pumpkin patch: wholesome and sincere. The family-friendly, three-day community event has become an autumn tradition and one of Southwestern Pennsylvania's most popular festivals.

"We like to say we're a nice, family-oriented festival," said Jonathan Taylor, a volunteer firefighter with the Houston Fire Department and one of the festival's planners. "We're proud of the festival we put on. We provide a little something for just



PHOTO COURTESY OF JONATHAN TAYLOR

The sixth-graders at Allison Park Elementary School re-created Linus' pumpkin patch for a float in the annual Houston Pumpkin Festival Parade in 2011.

about everyone who comes, whether they're there for entertainment, crafts, food or games. It's a great place to bring the family."

The festival, now in its 29th year, draws

about 100,000 visitors annually to the one-stoplight town with a population of about 1,400 people. It is slated for Oct. 12-14.

33

Continued on next page



JIM McNUTT / O-R

Firefighters with the Houston Volunteer Fire Department in Houston pose for a photo at the American Legion grounds where they hold the Pumpkin Festival in October. Proceeds raised go for new equipment for the fire department. From left are: Dave Luongo; Kevin Gasmire, lieutenant; Carl Bruno; Al Nagy; Louie Oliverio; Jason Marth, first lieutenant; Jim Denny, chief; Chad Roberts; Jonathan Taylor; Josh Young, chief engineer; Robb Meddings, assistant chief; T.J. Dunn, captain.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JONATHAN TAYLOR

The crowd fills the grounds of the Houston American Legion for the Pumpkin Festival. A giant bounce castle and slide are some of the many activities available for children who attend the festival, an autumn tradition.

From previous page

During the gala (it has earned the title Hometown Favorites Best Local Fair and Festival), the grounds of the Houston American Legion are covered with more than 175 craft and food booths, and children's games, events and entertainment are provided all weekend long.

Originally, the Pumpkin Festival was organized by the borough, a small, autumn affair to draw visitors to the stores along Pike Street and to provide a little entertainment for kids. But it really took off in 1996, when the fire department took over and turned it into its most profitable – and only – fundraiser.

According to Taylor, 80 percent of the fire department's budget is generated from the festival. The department recently purchased a utility truck to replace its aging truck, thanks to proceeds from the festival.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JONATHAN TAYLOR

Contestants shovel in pumpkin pie slices during the 2011 pumpkin pie-eating contest sponsored by Bob Evans Restaurant. The contest is one of the festival's most popular events.

"We pretty much live and die by it," said firefighter and parade planner Charles Meddings. "The festival keeps the doors open and lets us operate."

One of the highlights of the festival is the annual Pumpkin Festival Parade. Thousands of spectators line the half-mile route to watch the floats, costumed characters, marching bands and dance troupes march past.

"It's hard to believe it's Houston when you come over the hill past the Pie Place and you see all those people here for the parade," said Taylor. "It's a bit overwhelming. It really draws a big crowd."

The festival planners start organizing the event every March and work hard to bring in top-notch entertainment. This year, American Idol semifinalist Adam Brock will perform with The Soul Band, and the Blue Collar Band and Easy Street Band also will play. Back by popular demand is the pumpkin pie-eating contest, in which each contestant eats an eight-inch pumpkin pie as quickly as possible. Last year's winner devoured the pie in about 1½ minutes.



35

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The 2011 Pumpkin Festival Prince and Princess, Jakob Brice and Triniti Brooks, sport their sashes and hold onto their prizes after they were crowned winners.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF JONATHAN TAYLOR

Jordan and Alexis Bogden decorate pumpkins with their son, Teegan, and niece, Brooklyn Hess, at the pumpkin-decorating table at the Houston Pumpkin Festival.

And participants in the second annual pumpkin seed-spitting contest will have an opportunity to break the current world record of 34 feet. Last year's best effort was a 28-foot spit.

For teens, the festival hosts an In-It-to-Win-It competition: High school students compete in one-minute challenge games, like separating M&M's into paper cups according to color and stacking dice on a tongue depressor held in their mouths.

Children's activities have grown to include an inflatable slide, a 30-foot rock-climbing wall, Euro bungee, horse rides, a petting zoo, pumpkin decorating and train rides.

It's hard to resist the variety of tasty treats available at the festival, including funnel cakes, cotton candy, hot dogs and other refreshments.

"We're happy about the festival and how it's become an important community event," said Taylor. "The longevity is amazing. I don't think when it began that anybody thought it would last this long. It keeps getting bigger. And better."

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Houston Pumpkin Festival Schedule

Friday, Oct. 12

- Noon: Opening ceremony, featuring crowning of festival prince and princess and Chartiers-Houston High School Marching Band
- 1:30 p.m.: In-It-to-Win-It for youth and teens

Saturday, Oct. 13

- 8:45 a.m.: Registration for costume contest
- 9:15 a.m.: Costume judging and awarding of prizes

- 10 a.m.: 29th annual parade
- 12:30-3 p.m.: Blue Collar Band
- 3:30-5 p.m.: Fifth annual pumpkin pie-eating contest, sponsored by Bob Evans
- 5-7 p.m.: Adam Brock & the Soul Band

Sunday, Oct. 14

- 9:45 a.m.: Open-air church service on stage
- 1-5 p.m.: Easy Street Band
- 2:30 p.m.: Pumpkin seed-spitting contest

37

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**ALLENPORT BORO
\$61,900**

Want a clean, well-maintained 3 bedroom home on the water? Look no further! Larger than it looks, with spacious Living Room and Dining Room. Kitchen is bright and airy with white cabinets and is fully-equipped with all appliances. First floor 1/2 bath adds convenience for entertaining. Updated windows throughout. Detached 1-car garage. Walking distance to the community park and few blocks from boat dock. Close to Cal U and the interstates. Home Warranty!! MLS# 911329



**N. BETHLEHEM TWP.
\$244,900**

What a find in Scenery Hill! SOLID all-brick 3 bedroom ranch on a private 10 acres. HUGE, full basement just waiting to be finished into your future family room (complete with half bath). Oak kitchen cabinets with walk-in pantry off kitchen. Living Room complete with wood-burning Fireplace. Covered rear patio. Roof 6 years old. Approx. 5 miles from the 84 Truck Stop/I70 interchange. HSA Home Warranty Included! This is a MUST SEE! MLS# 925204



**N. STRABANE TWP.
\$275,000**

COMMERCIAL - Zoned C1 - currently McNary's Auto Sales. Great opportunity for a residence and business on a highly-traveled road. Value is in the commercial property - house needs a lot of TLC. Property for sale includes a large metal pole barn in rear with concrete floor, office/one bay garage, and residence (all on approx. 1.3 acres of land). Taxes and lot dimensions/size approximate. MLS# 921905



**N. BETHLEHEM TWP.
\$439,900**

CUSTOM Lindal Cedar home with tongue and groove cedar interior walls. Hickory kitchen cabinets/Corian countertops. Finished game room in lower level with spiral staircase/bar/woodburning fireplace. 18'x18' covered deck area with gas/stone fireplace. Deck COMPLETELY surrounds home. HUGE 32'x38' detached garage/heated/AC. FULLY finished second level in garage with walk-out access to yard and 1/2 bath. 30'x40' framed storage building with 2nd floor for additional storage. Den in upper level is LOFT. Many upgrades throughout!!! MUST SEE!! MLS# 907236



**AMWELL TWP.
\$169,900**

TONS of potential for this 3 bedroom in Trinity Schools! HUGE family room with soaring cathedral ceilings and exposed beams. Updated kitchen with tile back splash. First floor master with on-suite full bath. Finished lower level with additional room that could be 4th bedroom. Large integral garage. MLS# 929593