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Take a ghostly tour through one of Billings oldest neighborhoods

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Every year at Halloween, Joyce Mayer is asked if the Moss Mansion is haunted. The turn-of-the-century home, which sits at the helm of one of Billings oldest neighborhoods at 914 Division St., appears large and daunting as it rises 45 feet into the Billings skyline.

"From a historical viewpoint, I just can't give it any credit," said Mayer, who is the executive director of the Mansion.

Built in 1903 for Preston Boyd Moss for him and his family, the mansion has 28 rooms and still has original draperies, fixtures, furniture, Persian carpets and artifacts on display.

The Mansion does partake in Halloween festivities. Volunteers dress in costume and hand out candy on Halloween night

"The spirit on Halloween in this neighborhood is pretty cool," Mayer said.

Spirited Neighborhood

The neighborhood surrounding Moss Mansion is gearing up for trick-or-treaters, many who will come from other areas of the city to partake in strolling the streets for sweet treats.

Kathy Whittenberger, who lives at 114 Yellowstone, said decorating in the neighborhood is a "keeping up with the Joneses sort of thing."

"I bought new decorations this year because I felt like I was falling behind," she said.

Streetlights along Lewis and Clark avenues illuminate sidewalks. Festive pumpkin bags have been tied atop the light poles, adding to the allure.

Jodi Cockburn, who lives in a colonial-style home at 122 Clark Ave., said being on Clark Avenue on Halloween is like being on Grand Central Station.

She and her husband have lived on the block for seven years. They dress up for the occasion and hand out candy to the kids and cider to the adults.

The neighborhood spirit inspires the Cockburns to participate each year.

"If we were doing it alone it would be not be as much fun," she said. "When new people move to the block, it gets contagious and you pass along the spirit."

The Cockburns are door neighbors of the Deppmeier family, owners of a 19th century bungalow located at 128 Clark Ave.. They experienced their first Halloween in the neighborhood last year.

"Without a doubt Clark Avenue is the spot; it imports trick-or-treaters," Dennis Deppmeier said. "Everyone tried to explain to us what it was like. Last Halloween I started handing out candy and didn't go back in the house for hours. It was like nothing I've ever seen before."

An anonymous Clark Avenue resident dresses up as a wizard every Halloween and entertains trick-or-treaters while at the same time patrolling the street.

"It's a nice neighborhood and a safe neighborhood for your children to trick or treat," said Vicki Moore, who lives in the 300 block of Clark Avenue. "It is not unusual to get 1,000 trick-or-treaters."

Deppmeier counted at least 800 visitors to his doorstep last year. "(Halloween on Clark Avenue) was different than anything I could have imaged," he said.

"It's the 'Saturday Evening Post' sort of experience that everyone imagines Halloween to be," Whittenberger said.

A witching experience

The home that draws audiences from near and far is Edna Dempster's at 301 Clark Ave.

Moore, who lives next-door to Dempster, said it is a right of passage for neighborhood children to make it past the wrought-iron gate enclosing the yard and up to the door.

"That is the house that really draws a lot of people outside the area," Moore said.

Dempster has lived at the turn-of-the-century Greek Revival-style home for 15 years, and has been decking it out for Halloween for just as long.

Pumpkins, skulls and a variety of frightening Halloween decorations turn this historic home into a haunted manor.

A Bates Motel sign hangs from the second story balcony. A life-sized ghoulish butler mannequin and dancing pirate skeleton greet visitors at the front door. A witch hangs from the third story of the home.

Each year, Dempster has friends and family help her set up the exterior, which takes all day. She

does not put decorations up until Halloween day, to avoid vandalism and theft.

Several of her assistants dress in costume to lurk through the yard and linger on the porch and balcony during trick-or-treat time.

Last year Dempster had more than 1,200 trick-or-treaters come through the wrought-iron gate, brave the yard-turned-graveyard and grab a treat before the live spooks can grab them.

Her devilish decorating came naturally when she moved to Clark Avenue.

"It started with the neighborhood," she said. "I always got into the holidays but Halloween has gotten extreme."

And the kids revel in the experience, coming by the busload to partake in trick-or-treating on Clark Avenue.

"Thank God that there are still neighborhoods like this, where parents and kids can go and feel safe. That's why we all do it; it's for the kids."

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