

TO HALLOWEEN OR NOT

By Amie Windsor

I have to admit, I might be overdoing Halloween this year. At least on the costume front. Blame it on the fact that I have two girls who love playing dress up. Blame it on the fact that I love costumes. Or, blame it on the fact that these days, playing make believe is far better than living in the real world.

COVID-19 has already taken so much away from our children. I see it in my two girls every day – in their lack of friends and socialization, their inability to access adults other than my husband and me and the many, many forgone birthday parties and other celebrations that are so integral to childhood. Perhaps I'm a little sensitive (for anyone who knows me, you know that's probably an understatement), but **Halloween seems particularly important this year, especially in Sonoma County.**

Last year's Halloween, for those who might have a difficult time reaching that far back into the caverns of their memories (and who wouldn't with everything that 2020 has dealt us), was served up so abruptly after returning home from the Kincade Fire. We were lucky here in Sebastopol. The four of us returned home after stints in Oakland and Sea Ranch, to a fridge full of foul food, and were able to scrape together costumes. Dressed as the Magic School Bus, Miss Frizzle, Liz the Lizard and well, a 2-year-old, we managed to trek up to Florence Avenue for the first time since moving to Peacetown in 2015.

Our neighbors and friends in Windsor and Healdsburg weren't so lucky. They were not yet home from evacuation and had to hold citywide Halloweens nearly a week later.

This year, some Sonoma County municipalities have determined it is not in their interest to provide Halloween happenings for children ("I've not known the City government to directly provide holiday celebration activities," Sebastopol councilmember Sarah Glade Gurney sent in a text message.) The City of Santa Rosa cancelled all park events, including the beloved Howarth Park Halloween event.

Others however, such as the Town of Windsor, have stepped up to the plate to bring some holiday happiness and hope (see accompanying side bar for local happenings). Additionally, local Chambers of Commerce are rallying local businesses to offer safe and socially distanced options for children and their parents to enjoy. In West County, Guerneville residents can enjoy a Main Street parade, complete with sealed candy. And in Rohnert Park, the Chamber of Commerce is hosting a drive in movie series at SOMO Village during the Halloween weekend.

Wherever and however you celebrate Halloween, it is incumbent upon us caregivers to keep our children and neighbors safe, just like it is every Halloween.

All events are subject to change

For those passing out candy:



Keep it separate: Children should not be digging into a single bowl of candy. Use creative hands-free options to pass the candy out yourself. Wear a mask



Make your participation obvious: Mark your house on your local Nextdoor app as a participant in trick or treating. Purple pumpkin's indicate trick-or-treaters are welcome.



Expect chaos: But have fun and breathe. Halloween is on a Saturday this year

For those who want to stay in:



Take a cue from the Easter Bunny and trick-or-treat around the house to find hidden candy



Get your groove on with a family dance in costumes. Check out streaming services, including Sonoma County Library's Hoopla app



Watch your favorite Halloween family movie. Use the IMDB.com to check appropriate content for young ones.



Go on a fall-themed scavenger hunt: Changing leaves, acorns, pinecones and other signs of fall are all around



Make your favorite fall recipe: Candied apples, apple cider and popcorn



Hang onto your favorite traditions: Decorate your house, play the Halloween music and carve pumpkins. Children crave routine and keeping traditions alive will help keep them grounded amid this time of abnormality



For those going trick-or-treating:



Consider being tested for COVID-19. Free testing is available. Make your appointment at LHL.com.



Wear a mask: Masks are an integral part of many costumes just as they are an integral part of keeping community members safe from the spread of COVID-19



Keep your distance: Continue to stay socially distanced from others. Be respectful and mindful of others.



Don't eat candy until you're home: Parents, caregivers and kids alike are supposed to follow this rule whether we're in a pandemic or not. This year, is more important than ever. Children and parents need to keep hands out of their mouths. If you absolutely need the sugar boost, consider bringing pieces of candy from your house to give the kiddos while on the go (And don't forget the hand sanitizer!).

