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Home
News
Police Report
Obituaries

Currents
Opinion
Calendar
Sports

Classifieds

Display Ads

About us

Feedback

Subscription

Email Updates

Community Guide

PHOTO STORE

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search

Advanced Search

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North Riverside officials seek safe streets for Freaky Frights

*One-way streets, parking restrictions near Forest Ave.
display*

By **ROBERT CARR**

Safe scaring is the primary goal for the Freaky Frights on Forest event this Halloween in North Riverside.

For the weeks leading up to Oct. 31, thousands of children and their parents will visit the 2200 and 2300 blocks of Forest Avenue, where just about every house is decorated with terrors such as haunting ghoul graveyards, pirate skeletons and inflatable Frankensteins.

The event has grown substantially over the years, enough to warrant closed streets every night, extra police patrols and house barricades.

With this growth comes the need to control traffic, both on the street and the sidewalks, according to village officials. For the second year in a row, the village's Board of Trustees has authorized the streets south of Cermak Road and just east of Desplaines Avenue to be temporary one-way avenues. Other safety measures will be enforced for the weekends leading up to Halloween, said Police Chief Anthony Garvey.

"Because this brings a lot of traffic through a mostly residential area, we want to give it more attention," Garvey said. "We need to make sure vehicles get through safely, and make sure kids in the area are also safe."

Residents told the board at its meeting Oct. 3 that they like the event, but want to make sure their neighbors are protected.

"The traffic does get really bad," said Karen Quinn. "I guess it's only one time of the year, and the one-way streets do help."



File photo
Scary stuff: The 2200 and 2300 blocks of Forest Ave. in North Riverside have drawn such big crowds that the village has set up traffic, parking and trick-or-treat restrictions in the area.

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To further control traffic, Forest Avenue will be blocked off from dusk to 10 p.m. on school nights, and dusk to 11 p.m. on Friday and Saturday nights, with increased parking restrictions. On Halloween, Monday, Oct. 31, the front porches will be blocked off with "Do Not Cross" tape, and groups of residents instead will give out candy at various stations along the block.

"We'll probably have four stations," said Jim Currie, a resident who's leading the spook effort. "It just works out better that way. With the incredible flow of kids we get, it's impossible to get them to each door."

While resident Mark Sajatovic is credited for establishing Forest Avenue as one of the Chicago area's best Halloween displays, Currie joined in with his fright display expertise when he moved into the block four years ago. Currie even sets up a screen, put up between trees on his lawn, creating a mini-drive-in scary movie site.

"I used to do this where I grew up in California; it's a lot of fun," Currie said Oct. 15, as he and friends installed lamps in small skeletons. "We go to shows and learn the best techniques, and pay for the props ourselves. It's free for the kids. We want to put on a good show that everybody can enjoy."

He said he's not worried about crowds getting out of hand. The worst that's happened is some vandalism to the displays, he said. Otherwise, visitors have been civil.

"We've got plainclothes police walking through, some even in costume. We also this year have installed some video cameras, just to keep an eye on things," Currie said.

The one-way street signs and barricades will come down Nov. 1, said Village Administrator Guy Belmonte.

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