

Pumpkin patch to pave way for fun, fundraising

BY JO-ANN JENNINGS
Staff Writer

This year, the First United Methodist Church (FUMC) Pumpkin Patch for Mission opens Monday, Oct. 3.

"One of the things I love about the Pumpkin Patch for Mission is that through the outdoor classroom, we get to provide an educational, fun and inexpensive place for local schools to bring their students on field trips," said co-director Mendi Burns. "This allows our church to have fun and show love to the kids in our community."

Co-director Melissa Welborn added, "The pumpkin patch is an outreach to our community, a venue for multiple mission opportunities. Our church members get to serve their community for an entire month."

Welborn said the outdoor classroom provides a free educational and fun experience to local

schools. This year, Open Table Community Cafe will host a fundraiser lunch on Saturday, Oct. 29.

In addition, FUMC will be collecting socks for adults to donate to Night Light Tulsa and donating 120 pumpkins to the organization on Thursday, Oct. 6 for its community to decorate and take home.

"It's a blessing to see something as simple as a pumpkin bring a smile to someone's face day after day," Welborn said. "However, our church knows it's not about the pumpkins. It is truly about the people — the volunteers, the families in Owasso and surrounding communities who visit the patch, the mission organizations locally who serve our neighbors and communities in Mexico and Bolivia."

Donna Ferris of FUMC said the church has hosted the annual pumpkin

Local, global missions supported through the FUMC Pumpkin Patch:

Arubah Community Clinic
CJAMM Ministries
Bolivian Pastors Endowment Fund
Change the World
City Lights Foundation (sponsor of Night Light Tulsa)
Exodus House
FUMC Christmas Everyday Fund
FUMC Food Pantry
Kansas City Urban Family Mission Trip
Missions to Bolivia
Missions to Mexico
Open Table Community Cafe
Owasso Community Resource Center
Restore Hope Ministries
Rising Hope Ministries
Yellow Balloon Scholarships
Youth Force



Scarlet the Scarecrow entertains children who visited the Pumpkin Patch last year. COURTESY OF FUMC

patch since 2001. "Not only do we raise money for local, national and international

missions, but the pumpkin patch also provides an opportunity for our church to be a church outside the walls," Ferris said. "We engage the community every day in October and demonstrate love and kindness on a daily basis."

The intention of the pumpkin patch mission is to offer a safe and fun fall activity for families to enjoy year after year. Admission is free. Pumpkins are priced by size. Some crafts have a fee.

Learning activities are offered in the outdoor classroom on weekdays — a maze, coloring stickers and miniature pumpkins for 50 cents or \$1.

"In past years, we've had over 3,000 school kids come through our patch," Ferris said. "We are a four-time winner of the Pumpkin Patch Appeal Award out of 1,300 different sites. We've been listed in TulsaKids as the No. 1 place for children in October."

Ferris added that the

pumpkin patch also offers a wonderful backdrop for an autumn season photo opportunity.

"Bring the whole family and snap your holiday picture," she said. "Make the Pumpkin Patch for Mission a tradition for your family and help us support our local community and beyond."

Ferris shared that community support since the beginning has allowed the church to fund and sponsor many missions.



Runners take off in last year's annual Hance Henrie Run during the Pumpkin Patch celebrations. COURTESY OF FUMC

Free preschool programs abound at library

BY JO-ANN JENNINGS
Staff Writer

Sherry Wimberley has been one of the highlights at the Owasso Library for 10 years.

She's the personality and voice behind My First Storytime, Preschool Storytime, and Stay and Play on Tuesdays and Wednesdays — a favorite for young children and their parents or caregivers.

My First Storytime meets at 10 a.m. for children birth to 2 years old, followed by Preschool Storytime at 10:30 a.m. Many of the kids stay over at 11 a.m. for art projects and playtime, pulling out clothes for playing dress-up and any number of other toys that lend to their imagination.

Owasso Library Manager Jennifer McQuade calls Wimberley amazing.

"She brings people in

from Skiatook Sperry, Tulsa, Jenks and Bixby," McQuade said. "Her storytimes are wonderful. She has been doing this for years and is definitely one of the best children's librarians."

Wimberley said she's been at the Owasso Library since 2006 and before that taught elementary school for four years in the Tulsa Public School District. Why does she do this kind of work? "It's my passion!" she exclaimed without hesitation.

Wimberley said she enjoys working in "early literacy" with children, providing storytime, books and activities.

"It's not the traditional storytime when everyone has to sit still, be quiet and listen," she said. "It's not like that any more."

She encourages the caregivers to let their children stand up or walk



Sometimes in songs, children can be trains, and other times they can be dinosaurs. Whatever they are, they can use their imaginations to learn new words and socialize.

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around. "They don't have to be sitting down to hear the story," she added.

Her methods vary as the morning goes forward.

Wimberley reads a story then sings a song with the children. Some of the songs are fast and have hand and foot motions so the kids are kept busy

and moving. Then she reads another book. Parents and other caregivers go through the motions of the songs with the children.

"They learn a lot," Wimberley said. The children hear the sounds of different words and create a foundation for reading.



Some children stay after Storytime to engage in art projects, and others play with their library friends.

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The movement they do interacts with the books.

During storytime, Wimberley said, the children learn topics, vocabulary, relationships, conversation and problem solving. "Picture books have

many uncommon words, helping create a great vocabulary," she said, "and playtime is an extension of storytime."

Wimberley has two children of her own, Luke, eight, and Evelyn, three.

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