

# Pumpkin Glow



Derek Ellis of Ellis Home & Garden spoke with Lawn & Garden Retailer about how it uses the expansive property at its Longview, Texas, store to throw an annual fall and Halloween extravaganza on the third Thursday of October from 4:30-9 p.m. that drew nearly 8,000 people last year.

By Abby Kleckler



## HOW DID THE EVENT START?

Being a family business we wanted to generate an event that was for families and free to the public. The first year of Pumpkin Glow (2012) we donated pallets of pumpkins to a number of schools, and they would divide them up for the classes to do what they called dioramas of scenes like Wizard of Oz. Half the time they ended up needing 10 or 15 more pumpkins to complete the diorama, so we would get business back. The day the event hit, people could come to our store and see the displays. After the second or third year, the school participation rate continued to decline, but the payroll from the event was huge, so we had to find a way to make it work both for the public and for the business.

## WHAT DOES THE EVENT LOOK LIKE TODAY?

The event at this point has really evolved. People started dressing up in costumes, and we started focusing on photo ops. We set up a property map, and have 10 or 11 photo ops like a Cinderella carriage, which we brought in from China that is pretty cool, and some antique tractors, antique wagons, an old red truck and face cutout areas. This all did really well, people really loved it, and it is still free. We realized though once you walked the path there wasn't really anything to do, so we started rolling out entertainment sections of the event a few years ago — moon jumpers, face painting, pumpkin decorating. Our goal was to cover the expenses on the event, so we have a ticket house to consolidate all the transactions. They give us \$10, we give them 10 tickets, and then they could use those tickets on the whole property. They could pay two tickets for face painting, one ticket for the jump house, buy concessions and more. We've expanded over the years and last year we added our No. 1 event: a petting zoo, which did incredibly well.



## WHAT MARKETING HAVE YOU FOUND SUCCESSFUL?

This was our sixth year, and we had 7,811 people. In 2016, we had 3,750 people! The only marketing change we did was to spend \$200 on Facebook in the weeks leading up to the event and to go live on Facebook at the event. Partnering with local businesses is also a great way to drive traffic because it's on their social media or their emails to their customer base that they'll be at Ellis. We had one business that does local birthday parties for little girls dress up like Ana and Elsa (from the movie Frozen) and pay us to come do kids' makeup. We also had a local water park pay us to be at the event, and a hospital sponsored one of the tents. These synergies might be part of the reason we saw such an exponential growth this year.



## WHERE DO YOU SEE THE EVENT GOING?

One thing we noticed this year is that the more activities we added, the longer families were staying. A lot of times this event is wrapped up by like 8 p.m. This year at 9 p.m., there were hundreds of people still on the property. For 2018, our new entertainment is going to be pony rides, which we ran with a Polar Express event we do at another one of our other stores, and it did really well at \$5/five tickets per ride. Our idea is also to have another local business sponsor the jump houses, face painting or other activities to cover the cost of the supplies needed. The event is good exposure, and it's incredible how much it gets a lot of people talking about you in the community. It's really important especially for me with four kids to keep this a free event that brings families out, and then they can do inexpensive activities if they'd like. **LGR**