

Town scales back Halloween

Officials want to continue trend

BY EMILY STEPHENSON
ASSISTANT CITY EDITOR

After this year's last-minute campaign to make Halloween on Franklin Street smaller and safer, local leaders are already evaluating the event and planning for next October.

Officials said restrictions intended to keep out-of-towners from traveling to Chapel Hill and to prevent the alcohol problems usually inherent at downtown Halloween celebrations were overwhelmingly successful.

"We'd like to build on that success," said Butch Kisiah, director of parks and recreation.

"One of the things I want to make sure of is that we can do

this two years in a row."

The town's Homegrown Halloween campaign began in the summer, when leaders, including Mayor Kevin Foy, discussed ways to make the event smaller and more local.

Halloween 2007 saw about 80,000 revelers on Franklin Street, most of whom officials said traveled to Chapel Hill from other parts of the state.

Concerns about the number of attendees, alcohol abuse and potential gang-related violence spurred officials to implement a list of restrictions, including shutting down bus service to parking lots, setting up alcohol checkpoints around town and asking

Franklin Street bars to close their doors at 1 a.m.

A plan to clear the street of pedestrians at midnight required the most coordination — about 100 police officers on foot, riding motorcycles, and driving cars and buses took over the street at about 12:15 a.m.

The town even attempted to mount officers on horses, but the trailer carrying them broke down on N.C. 54, preventing the horses from reaching Franklin Street.

Town officials said the measures contributed to the smaller crowd and decrease in crimes this year.

Officials say fewer than 40,000 people attended. Police arrested five people, down from 13 in 2007.

"We exceeded our best guess on how we would do this year in terms of making it a more manageable and safe event," said Capt. Chris Blue of the Chapel Hill Police Department. "Our sense is, generally speaking, there were fewer groups of people wandering the crowd who appeared to be

looking for trouble."

Kisiah said town and police representatives have begun meeting to evaluate the changes and plan for next year. Police recently met with Franklin Street bar owners, and town staff will sit down with UNC student government representatives in the next few weeks.

"The initial reactions have been pretty positive," he said. "Yeah we had some alcohol; yeah we had some folks that were drunk ... but you could just see a different attitude."

Town evaluations likely will be completed by early 2009, and planning will soon begin for next year.

Kisiah said most of the restrictions introduced this year will remain, but he hopes the town can shrink the party zone and close more of Franklin Street to pedestrians during next year's event.



DTH FILE/ANDREW JOHNSON

A man dressed in a police uniform with a toy horse helps Chapel Hill police officers clear Franklin Street of pedestrians on Halloween.

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