

Funworld May 2011



Typically relegated to a narrow six-week money-making window in the fall, haunted houses now are hoping to scare up additional revenue during Valentine's Day. Texas appears to be leading this trend where no fewer than five facilities opened this past February. "We really seemed to go for it," notes Richard Alvarado, owner of the Moxley Manor Haunted House in Bedford, Texas, who hosted "Blood, Chainsaws, and Valentines" in 2011.

For haunts in permanent locations, it makes little sense to pack up on Nov. 1, he contends. You're already paying for the space, so don't let it go to waste. Plus, additional holidays like Valentine's Day raise the awareness of your venue and build buzz for the bread-and-butter Halloween season, as well as keep up the morale and camaraderie of the crew.

"You can't just shut down after Halloween and expect everyone to keep in contact for a year," Alvarado says. "Our group is eager to see each other."

He first realized the off-season had potential to expand his reach this past Christmas when he opened for four weekends (dubbed "A Night Scare Before Christmas"). About 90 percent of the customers had never visited Moxley Manor before. To make his first Valentine's event—held Feb. 12—something special, he tore apart a third of the house and added some new rooms. The bedroom featured a murderous love scene with rose petals scattered about, which seemed to be a hit with the 400 guests who visited.

"There are a lot of scorned people out there," says Alvarado, who estimates groups of single friends made up half the crowd. "They didn't want to celebrate Valentine's Day. They wanted to do something different. That's where we came in."

Generate Brand Recognition

Jon Love also saw Valentine's Day as a way to tap into guests' need for a little variety. "By far, this is an alternative event," says the vice president of Harbinger Events Inc., owner of the House of Torment Haunted House in Austin, Texas. He's not directly competing with tried-and-true plans: "Restaurants are always going to be packed on Valentine's Day. That's the thing to do. We don't expect people not to go to dinner. They come here before or after."

For three years now, Love has presented his "Dark Stalkers" event, a totally different experience from the "festival atmosphere" of their traditional haunted house during September and October. Armed with only a glow stick, guests—who