



Haunting for Hunger

By Kevin Fritz

Watson Realty's Haunted Mansion helps fill the shelves of the Second Harvest Food Bank.

Be afraid; be very afraid. Or not — your choice. Either way, you will be reveling in the spirit of Halloween while doing your part to help feed the hungry.

The brainchild of **Lynda Miller**, a licensed Realtor with Watson Realty Corp., the entire second floor of the real estate office on Wekiva Springs Road in **Longwood** has been transformed into an elaborate and spooky haunted house for the second consecutive year. Its two sections of goblins and ghouls allow for the very young and/or very squeamish to visit the not-so-scary area, while those looking to have their hair stand on end and get their hearts pumping can take a walk on the scarier side of life.

The 4,000-square-foot labyrinth of fright and fun will be open to the public on the evenings of Friday, October 25 and Saturday, October 26 and will include food trucks, making a fun-filled evening of frights and food. Children under the age of 13 must be accompanied by an adult. Admission is a non-perishable food item to benefit the Second Harvest Food Bank.

More than 40 real estate associates and their broker, **Michael Chiorando**, pitch in to create this haunted, charitable outpost for thrill seekers young and old. The project is so detailed that the team began setting up displays around Labor Day. Miller says it will take about 10-15 minutes to meander through this year's grandma's house-themed haunted house.

"I have done a lot of haunted houses in my time," admits Miller, noting her home was the scene of many festive Halloween nights. She realized last year that with the help of her co-workers and broker, she could create a larger scale event and give back to the community at the same time.

"We had 400 people come through in one night last year, and we collected 207 pounds of food, enough for 138 meals," she says. "We are very proud of that." Miller hopes to double that mark this year by opening the haunted house for two nights.

Mindy Ortiz, volunteer services manager with Second Harvest Food Bank, says the non-profit collects more than 40 million pounds of food annually through corporate donations and community food drives like Watson Realty's Haunted Mansion. "Food drives supply nonperishable items that are greatly needed by our partner agencies and help provide varieties of food often difficult to obtain from our corporate food donors," Ortiz says.

Miller thanks Habitat for Humanity for donating furniture used in the haunted house. Miller adds that she is partnering with Lake Brantley High School this year, utilizing drama and photography students at the event, making the experience even more community-minded.

Susan Brown, photography and design instructor at Lake Brantley, says the students earn on-the-job training and credits for their work with Watson Realty's Haunted Mansion. The student coordinator, senior **Ciara Gregory**, says working on the project last year really piqued her interest in pursuing event photography career options.

Miller says at the end of the 4,000 square feet of fun, and after all the haunts have put revelers in the true Halloween spirit, there will be trick or treating for all, with agents and volunteers providing candy and goody bags. **L**

For more information about Watson Realty's Haunted Mansion, visit our website at CentralFloridaLifestyle.com.