

Wild West Haunted House brings spooky thrills close to home



By Brock Weir

Once upon a time, in a dark, dark house, lived two little kids who steered clear of their garage.

Spooky things were happening in there, and they wanted to avoid it at all costs.

Now that Sabrina and Jonathan Diana are a little bit older, however, they can't wait to get in the thick of it and spread the thrills and chills to anyone who dares enter.

This year, the Diana family of 40 Carlyle Crescent, are pulling out all the stops for their Hallowe'en Haunt, Gargalese Gates of Terror. Each year, the Hallowe'en enthusiasts spend a month transforming their home into a haunted house, open to anyone in the community in exchange for a simple donation to the Aurora Food Pantry.

Typically run over the course of two days, this year is a little bit different on two fronts: the Wild West Theme, and a third night of communal creeps.

"I have always been a big fan of the paranormal, Hallowe'en, and [husband] Paul is so creative," says Su Diana. "We started this over 10 years ago when we lived in Richmond Hill. We started with a little tombstone on the front lawn, and every year it gets bigger and better."

As the "haunting" grew, the Dianas incorporated their passion for giving back, choosing the Aurora Food Pantry as a beneficiary of their efforts.

Sue might be the big Hallowe'en enthusiast in the family, but Paul is the builder.

He tells The Auroran that with each passing year, their collection of props grows, along with their arsenal of special effects, and he starts assembling the display in the middle of September. In those early days, it's an hour here and an hour there, but in the last two weeks leading up to October 31, they are in "full-blown build mode."

"Our neighbours are used to it by now," says Su with a chuckle. "They walk by, they give us a lot of good feedback and say they are looking forward to it, and the kids start coming by in September because they know we do this and want to see where we're at. It's fantastic. Our neighbours do probably think we're a little crazy, but they come out and support us."

Also helping to support the Haunting for the first time this year are area schools Light of Christ Catholic Elementary School, where the Diana children are students, as well as Highview Public School next door.

"Come out and experience something fun and something super-scary," says Su. "We have something for all ages and something that is close to home. People don't have to venture too far out of their community to have some fun on Hallowe'en night and on the night before. This is just a family thing that has grown over the years, and now our kids help out."

"For the first couple of years, they didn't even want to go through it, but now they just love it," adds Paul.

"It's all about the kids and having someplace closer to home to venture out," says Su. "We're here and we're doing something good for the Food Pantry as well, which is really near and dear to my heart."

The Haunted Wild West house is open nightly starting October 29, 30, and 31 from 6.30 - 9 p.m. at 40 Carlyle Court.