An Unforgettable Texas Tradition

By Jackson Allen, Student

Van Alstyne High School’s Halloween tradition is an annual Haunted House, which is open to the public every year. “Every year I love-visiting the car show to see all the new and colorful vehicles,” says senior Jaidan Servat. “I also enjoy the staple food like the corn dog and all the unique fried foods you can leave.” Servat has attended the fair since she was a new-born.

During the months of September and October, during the tail end of August in the area, there is something for everyone. Not only is the food unique, but according to fair patrons, it’s delicious too.

VHA senior Caron Brown states, “The food at the fair is incredible, and every time I go, I can’t leave without having a corn dog and their cotton candy.”

These foods seem familiar to most, but this is far from all the fair has to offer. Some of the more outlandish foods at the fair include a pickle pizza, raspberry chipotle sopapilla, funnel cake chicken sandwich, and a deep-fried strawberry shortcake crunch roll.

During the months of September and October, frequent screaming, drilling, and banging radiate from Van Alstyne High School’s cafeteria stage. “The cause of all this?” An annual Haunted House is created, built, and staffed by adults around the community. It is another fall activity that locals are excited to attend: the State Fair of Texas. This seasonal attraction has started and area residents are eager to participate in its many traditions such as the food, the rides, and the livestock show.

As the State Fair begins every fall, a question on everyone’s minds is what new features are in store and what traditional favorites are staying. According to Jaidan Servat, “A Van Alstyne High School tradition is that locals are excited to maintain this event. I have attended the fair since I was a new-born. Caitlyn Rasor, another VHS senior, particularizes favorite traditions that she is in as well as some of the famous foods such as the tomato taters.”

Students need to test the boundaries of their own fears and what they think others would think about. “The survey data is remarkable in comparison with the expectations of Katia Ballard, one of the counselors tasked with maintaining the mental health of the VHS student body. Regarding the most common student fears, she responded, “What I see the most from students is concerns regarding making their mark on the world, so the concept of simply being remembered in the pages of history is devastating to them to think about.

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Keep an eye out for Part 2.

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Screams and Scars
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unformed idea until the student body creates change by taking the theme, characters, designs, concepts, and gays, says Jeremy Stein, the director and head of the theater department at VAHS. This year, the department settled on the theme “Haunted Man- or,” for which they created their own storyline, characters, and set design theme. However, creativity doesn’t stop there. The students are challenged to think of unconventional concepts for the house, usually leading to a slew of challenging notions to bring to fruition.

Technical challenges
As the house’s entire construction uses previously owned or donated materials from the community, resources are limited. Students must be innovative and precise when coming up with construction plans, says Ben Smith, a heavily involved tech student at VAHS. Tech students are primarily in charge of the planning and construction, including room designs, structural integrity, and concepts involving complicated mechanical dynamics within the house. This year, one of those concepts is a rising staircase. Smith describes this development process as an abundance of trial and error. He states that the process of frequent exchanges of breaking features, then fixing them, then something else breaking and fixing those, until eventually “you run out of things that break,” and they have a functioning and safe staircase. This process is repeat- ed over and over again throughout the building process, more with this year’s house than year before due to the house’s size, which is double the square footage of last year’s house. Stein states that this Haunted House is “the biggest build we’ve done.”

On top of the rising staircase, this house includes a second story, which has posed struggles in the structural integrity aspect, all of which have been overcome through the students and Stein’s trial-and-error processes.

Acting challenges
A moving staircase is just one major chal- lenge among many that the student body has overcome; however, the acting side of the event poses its own set of tri- als. For example, Mullins, the Thespian Guild Secretary and var- iety theater member, her personal obstacle looked slightly different. Mullins details her struggle in creating her character within the house due to the theme: “I was like, ‘Oh great. I’m not even going to be able to find anything I like out of [the theme].’ Initially, she thought the monor idea would not require much creativity for ac- tors.

Despite that, this view changed once Mullins dove into the creative aspect of the house, stat- ing, “But now I have found aspects of that I like, and we have made a story out of [the Haunted House] instead of just a house with random scares.”

cont. pg. 3

Help! Grayson College’s The Viking needs student content. Are you willing to contribute a lending hand? If so, please send any art work, writing, poems, pho- tos, etc. to the editor Katherine Petri at: pkpetri@viking.grayson.edu

Spook-tacular student writings

Denison, Texas
Boo! cont. from pg. 1

fear: acrophobia. Ac- raphobia, the fear of heights, is the fear of 15% of the students. However, having a natural sense of preservation, as staying alive is generally a life goal. As such, the possibility that one small slip at even the smallest height could spell the end for a lifetime easily plays into these students’ fears.

What do others fear? Same as me or different?
While looking at what most consider to be their greatest fear, the survey brings up a question that takes a look at what students believe other people most fear. The discrepancy between what students believe others fear most versus what they actual- ly fear is incredible. For instance, over 30% of students believe the scariest thing to everyone else are spiders and insects. However, when compared with the results from what students actually feared, only a third of the predicted survey group actually fears spiders and insects. Another disparity between graphs can be seen with the fear of people or specific persons. Over 10% of the students are afraid of either a group of people or one specific person. Yet, this 10% is completely negated when it comes to the predicted fears others may have: not even 1% of those surveyed believed that other students would fear certain groups of people. In contrast, there are some predicted fears that are decently close to their percentages of students’ fears. For example, the percentage of students who predicted death to be other students’ greatest fear is only 1% off of the actual number of sur- veyed students who consider death the scariest. Such similarities also exist for nyctophobia and xenophobia, which are the fears of the dark and the unknown respectively.

Those clowns . . .
A fear one may not expect is the prevalent fear of clowns, reported throughout the survey. As they are an occupa- tion meant to bring joy and laughs, it is unusual to see clowns as 6.5% of the student population’s biggest fear. The predict- ed fear almost doubles that, anticipating 10% of the surveyed population to be afraid of clowns. According to explanations given by those par- ticipating during the sur- vey, the fear of clowns is based in the cultural stig- ma of the killer clown. Despite the absence of such murderous jokers in the real world, the ef- fect of killer clowns in movies has terrified a decent percentage of our fellow classmates.

Not so funny: So is a fear a good thing? One surveyed student who is widely consid- ered to be fearful and skittish by her peers claiming, “[fear] makes it easy to be made fun of and people take you lightly.” She expressed her dis- may about how other students like to scare her, and even though she laughs it off, she still feels slightly hurt. To summarize the sur- vey’s findings, the fears of students across cam- pus are diverse and unique. Even if students share a common fear, their reasoning may be different. From heights to spiders to clowns, each person’s fear is as unique as their fingerprint, and that just makes each human a little more spe- cial.

What People Fear The Most
What People Thought Others Would Fear The Most

Two charts depicting what Van Alstyne High School students surveyed said their greatest fear is (left) and what they predicted other stu- dents’ greatest fear is (right).

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the insideINGLE Mul- lins felt how towards the background of the house. Mullins created her character Bonnie McLaughlin, who is a widowed wife of a sick husband and has a child with the same sickness.

Mullins’s character goes to the cult that resides in the manor in order to try to heal her husband and child. However, when her husband dies, she decides to become a permanent resident. Bonnie works as a maid within the house, and it is there she learns of the awful activities and sacrifices of the cult.

This creation process repeats for each acting student within the department, leading to complex and diverse character depth and the background storyline of the house. Letting the creative ideas flow is a common practice by actors in this process. The actor’s creative processes drive a major motor in the house’s initial creation. “[Actors and actresses] make scenes, make artworks, and make the story of the house,” comments Mullins.

“The story of the house usually bleeds into the construction and how we build the house” because of how the [ideas factor into the background of the house].” The creative process between techs and actors is sometimes better because despite these differences, they all are fundamental.

Working towards a common goal of opening night, the students take away more than just fun memories and a monetary gain for the department. Within the building of the Haunted House, students learn an abundance of life skills. Stein notes the frequent skills he sees his students demonstrate during this process. He observes how his students use teamwork, creativity, problem-solving skills, and collaboration through the building of the house. He recalls “…watching them work together and figuring out how to fix something, or once a problem has presented itself, watching them come up with a solution. I think that’s a really cool moment.”

However, this isn’t just an occurrence observed by the director. Smith also experienced his own self-growth through the building of the staircase as well. “Understanding and working through the process of trial and error has become a significant takeaway I learned from the whole process,” says Smith. This self-growth is made possible through Stein’s unique approach to the event. Even though Smith is the director, he states his involvement is pretty hands-off: “…[techs and actors] have an immense amount of ownership towards [the house].” It’s not my idea. It’s what I want to do. I literally just take the ideas that are presented and find a way to make them happen.”

Funds raised enriching student activities

While maintaining safety and keeping specific ideas in check, Stein still manages to allow the students’ creativity to flow and flourish through their work on their Haunted House. For this reason, all the proceeds from this house contribute directly to the theater department’s activity account. Since the house is created almost solely from student ideas and work, the money donated and earned from the house goes right back to the students, providing the funds for the students to travel to the Texas State Thespian Convention, a 3-day long event for students, filled with theater workshops and shows that serves to strengthen technical and acting capabilities. He also shares his hopes for using the money in the future to take the students on trips such as watching a live performance in the Dallas Area.

Community races

Overall, students and previous Haunted House attendees are ecstatic about the yearly return of the house. Every year the house gains more and more attention, bringing in community people from all different age groups with varying reactions to the atmosphere and scares. For some, the physical scaring aspect is too much. However, for others like 48-year-old Shannon Jackson, who finds he doesn’t scare easily, the atmosphere created by the actors and the set’s design makes… cont. pg. 4

Unforgettable Tradition

cont. from pg. 1

These unique foods, along with many others, are just a taste of the new items that are coming to the State Fair this year. However, the focus point of attendees when asked about the food at the fair is to be the corn dog. Fletcher’s Fair booth is home to the classic corny dog, established in 1942 and flourishing to this day. But it’s also the rides!

Screams and Scares

cont. from pg. 2

The 2022 Van Alstyne Haunted House features a second story connected by a rising staircase. The staircase, which was a tech department-wide build, and primarily led by tech student Ben Smith (photographed), is awaiting the bustling activities of opening night.

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Photo by Nautica Barker

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So the food may play a major role in the State Fair of Texas, but when someone asks, “What is the Fair what will we see first?” The rides! More commonly known as Midway, the Texas State Fair provides more than 90 attractions, ranging from mirror mazes to the terrifying Top o’ Texas Tower.

Just like the food, patrons eager to feel the thrills and excitement that these attractions give. According to Ser- vanti, “I’m always excited to hop on the thrill rides, but my favorite has to be the Ferris wheel. You can see for miles at the top, and the rush that comes over you when looking straight down can’t be matched.”

And about that Livestock Show!

The Livestock Show at the State Fair of Texas drives a different crowd than the other two aspects normally do. This part of the Fair brings people from all over the country to compete. There are four different events that people participate in, including the Livestock Exhibitors, Horse Exhibitors, Youth Livestock Auction, and the rodeo. Rosser attends the annual showing events at the State Fair and even won last year’s competition for the Champion Overall Shorthorn in the Junior Breeding Heifers. Rosser says, “I love the thrill of the competition and get- ting to see all the spec- tacular animals. It was amazing to see all my hand work pay off as I won my competition, the feeling was like no other and I can’t wait to compete again this year.”

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Gleiber states, “We have a voluntary Board of Directors, which consists of about 20, including a Chairman of the Board.” This board is not the only leadership team within the fair, however.

“I manage our Senior Leadership team, who are all experts in their areas. It’s important to make sure everyone is working together to wards the same common goal of holding a suc cessful State Fair, then focusing on executing our nonprofit mission the remainder of the year.”

This many people, as well as what Gleiber states to be more than 2,000 seasonal employees, create an experience that can last a lifetime after one visit. Gleiber started at the Fair as the head of marketing and sponsorship in 1999. Then Gleiber stepped up as the President of the Fair in 2014. Gleiber knows that with the fun of the fair, there are also challenges that arise con stantly. He states, “We have challenges every day during the Fair. Each day is different, and you just have to be able to re act and make quick decisions on how to best handle situations that arise.” Not only are there the daily circum stances that get called to Gleiber’s attention, but also bigger challenges that if not executed ac cordingly could lead to disaster.

“The other big chal lenge comes from the fact that the State Fair is very diverse in terms of its offerings. We have departments that are very different from one another (Creative Arts, Midway, Livestock), and it’s important to make sure that all departments are working together for the greater good,” he explains. Mission of ag ri culture, education, and community involvement. The State Fair of Texas is a tradition that promi nes something new every year. But it was original ly created for a differ ent reason from the fun and food. This nonprofit organization successfully executes a month long project that leaves lasting memories and life-changing economic opportunities for thou sands.

Gleiber expresses for what is being our goals for the Fair, “To continue to stage an annual State Fair that is highly successful and something that fair goers will look forward to attending each year as part of an annual tra dition. Then, using our proceeds to make an im pact on the three areas that our mission focuses on… agriculture, edu cation, and community involvement.

Developing and executing impactful programs that focus on those areas is very important to us.”

https://wallpaperaccess.com/full/1147379.jpg

Happy Halloween everyone!!!

Screams and Scares

the house a worthwhile experience.

Jackson is a yearly at tendee to the Haunted Houses and expresses great satisfaction with his experiences: “I have always loved go ing through the Haunted Houses, they don’t really get scared, but I love the atmosphere.

‘There is some great en ergy from the actors, and they play their parts well. I have never been disappointed with the house, I love going every year.” He describes the house as a perfect Halloween activity and enjoys that it “supports our theater efforts, and their kids and their effort.”

Jackson is a strong ad vocate for the house, believing it’s worth any one’s time, as its multi tude of dynamic parts and immersive environment make it enjoyable for absolutely any age. Mullins shares his be lief, stating, “I just really hope that people enjoy it, but also that people will allow themselves to get involved in the house and enjoy the [storyline], letting us take them on this [journey]…”

The Van Alstyne Haunted House is open 6-9 pm on October 24, 25, and 26. Tickets cost $5 and can be purchased at the door. Donations, whether monetarily, supplies, costumes, or any thing else, are graciously accepted as well. Contact Theater Director Jeremy Stein via email at jstein@vanal styneisd.org.

The Van Alstyne Thea ter Department is prep ping, working, and ex citingly anticipating their Haunted House’s opening night and are looking forward to being able to entertain and thrill the public.