

“At Halloween, Adults Like Costumes that Trick and Treat”

By Karen Cristiano, Express Staff Writer

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Halloween night has always been a night of fantasy, a time to dress up and scare or amaze others.

But those who use costumes as a way to fantasize aren't just kids anymore. Adults in larger and larger numbers can be found at local supply stores buying accessories for costumes or at rental centers selecting their dream outfits. And they'll spare no expense.

Halloween costumes have changed quite a bit for the younger set, too. Boxed costumes of trendy characters, such as Rainbow Brite or Care Bears, have diminished in popularity. Kids – or sometimes their parents – would rather buy the accessories to put together the ideal costume, usually an old favorite, like pirates for boys and princesses for girls.

Kids also are asking their parents to make outfits and their parents are obliging. Sales of costume patterns are soaring – especially the newest ones which feature Disney characters.

When adults go to Halloween parties, men want to look scary, but women like to wear revealing outfits.

“A lot of women want to look sexy, they want to show off their bodies,” says Bill Frazetta, who runs Frazetta's Fantasy Corner in East Stroudsburg along with his sister, Holly. The Frazettas are the children of noted artist Frank Frazetta. To live out their fantasies, at least for a night, women rent Cleopatra costumes, or harem girl outfits, he says.

“A lot of guys want to be scary. We sell a lot of masks to them,” Frazetta explains. The store rents hundreds of costumes and sells hundreds of masks and costume accessories each Halloween.

Women don't care for the scary costumes, especially because the masks are hot, he says.

The only problem some customers face is deciding which costume to pick.

“They know what they want to be – until they come in here,” he says with a laugh.

Even though Halloween was three weeks away when Frazetta was contacted, “We've had at least 30 to 40 deposits put down on costumes,” he says.

Leiser's Rentals in Bethlehem is having similar success.

“We have probably 100 reservations at this point for different days,” says Linda Leiser-Uliana, president of Leiser’s. Her tally was taken nearly two weeks ago.

“the gorilla is probably the most popular (costume) for the man,” she adds.

Women usually rent the sexy, sequined outfits, although Little Bo-Peep is popular too. Women “live out their fantasies a little . . . It’s an excuse to wear something outrageous,” she says.

“We find that men like to wear costumes that completely cover them, so nobody knows who they are,” explains Diane Nagy, part owner of Taylor Rental Center in Washington. In addition to the traditional scary costumes, men pick out such outfits as the San Diego Chicken, a cat costume or the Blue Muncher, which looks like the Cookie Monster from Sesame Street.

“It (renting Halloween costumes) really seems to be picking up in popularity the last couple years,” she says. For that reason, the rental center stocks many different costumes. “We try not to have too many duplicates. A lot of people go to local parties and they don’t want to see themselves coming.”

Frequently, couples like to dress alike. Cave men and women are popular, as are super heroes or a priest/nun duo.

Although adults prefer scary or sexy costumes, they’re not immune from trends either.

“It does change slightly from year to year (based on) the new movies that come out,” says Leiser-Uliana. “the year E.T. came out, you couldn’t get enough E.T. masks. Now, they sit on the shelf. The Gremlins are still popular.”

The trendiest adult costume is the ninja, thanks to the release of Karate Kid II and other action films featuring the black-outfitted Oriental warriors.

Poking fun at politicians has never gone out of style, though. “(The) Nixon (mask) is still popular . . . they like to wear that with the convict costume,” says Leiser-Uliana.

The Nixon masks are big sellers, too, at Edward’s Card and Gift Shop at the Palmer Park Mall, says manager Arlene Dietrich. “They’re gone in no time,” she says. Second to sell out are the horrible-looking masks. Men usually buy them.

The monk’s robe is a perennial best seller for men because it can be used for a wide variety of outfits.

Although Edward's sells masks, makeup and other Halloween costume accessories for young and old, the adults are definitely the big spenders. "They think nothing of it – spending \$90 to \$100 for one night," Dietrich says.

Roger Cook, owner of Clinton 5 & 10, agrees with Dietrich that when it comes to Halloween, adults will spare no expense. One woman came in recently with a long list of items she needed to be Aunt Jemima. And they weren't just Halloween accessories, Cook says. He and the woman went from department to department, buying such items as earrings, until the outfit was complete.

"Adults will come in and spend \$20 or \$30 for a costume," he says.

Although kids don't spend a fortune for costumes, the selection of the perfect outfit is still a top priority. What are they buying this year? The old favorites – princesses, devils, butterflies, pirates – are still best sellers. Although most rental centers offer only adults costumes, Leiser's in Bethlehem has costumes for children. The kids like the animal costumes, such as skunks and cats, and the older ones prefer the space suits, report Leiser-Uliana.

"We find boxed costumes really don't sell that much," says Cook. "People really want to create their own . . . We sell an awful lot of makeup." Accessories are popular as are items to make the two trendiest outfits for kids – ninja and Rambo.

In past years, kids snapped up boxed costumes of that's year's movie, television or marketing trend. Rainbow Brite boomed last year, although now it's a bust.

"Pound Puppies is one that was selling well," this year, Cook notes. His store is sold out, but Cook didn't order many.

"Kids are a little more sophisticated nowadays," he says, and they prefer to make their own costumes. Many kids and their parents think boxed costumes are tacky, he says.

Many parents are making children's costumes. Cheryl Statham, manager of So-Fro Fabric at the Palmer Park Mall, says patterns are selling faster this year than ever before.

Some were sold out in August. "The ones who sew regularly are coming in early for them," Statham says.

One of the biggest sellers is the new line of Disney costumes, including Mickey and Minnie Mouse, and the Seven Dwarfs, Snow White and Donald and Daisy Duck. Others include vampires, rabbits, clowns, and princesses. "It's more the old favorites," she says. "The other things just sit there."

Robin Rose of Simplicity Patterns, which also sells the Disney characters, attributes their popularity to the attention Disney has been getting recently.

“I know that clowns are our number one best seller” because the pattern is easy “and every kid wants to be a clown. Minnie Mouse is our second best seller.”

Less trendy patterns are selling for another reason too: They can be passed down from one child to another and never get dated.

Masks have definitely lost ground to makeup as the cover of choice for children’s faces, she says. That’s because a mask can obscure vision, and lead to accidents when kids are out at night trick or treating. Half-masks are a good compromise she says.

When Halloween comes this year, then, expect to greet lots of pirates and princesses and Disney characters at your door. If you attend a grown-up party, don’t be surprised if your staid corporate executive next door comes as a gorilla and his prim and proper wife as a harem girl.

As Frazetta points out, “There’s 365 days a year. Why not be somebody else one day a year?”