

Businessman Builds Dream Scream House

BY JOHN TAYLOR
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Don C. Losole got the idea for the "Fright Zone" while he was working on the "Train of Terror" on a break from his real job of creating patterns for 70-by-38-inch Santa toy shops.

Losole is not your ordinary businessman.

"I decided I wanted to do something that Omaha had never seen before, something really big, and I did it," said Losole.

What Losole did was to create what he believes is the largest for-profit haunted house in Omaha.

In that, it differs from other haunted houses that spring up at this time of year and are aimed at raising money for various charities.

He leased 20,000 square feet of space at the Millard Plaza Shopping Center at 138th and Q Streets, knocked out some walls, built other walls, and converted space formerly occupied by a fitness club, a beauty shop and a cafe into a home for Halloween monsters.

"There are a number of haunted houses out there," said Losole, whose main business is Yard Art Inc., a company that creates holiday yard decorations and patterns for other people to put up displays.

"But they charge you \$5 and it takes five minutes to go through. To me, it's not the way to go. We wanted to put on a professional haunted house to see if it could be done."

The result was the creation of 28 rooms of different designs that are populated by your standard Halloween ghouls and ghosts. It costs \$7 for the 15- to 25-minute tour. The Zone opened Oct. 1 and is open from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays and 6 p.m. to midnight Fridays and Saturdays.

Losole said he has invested about \$250,000 in the project. He started planning it last November and began con-



JEFF BUNDY / THE WORLD-HERALD

DON LOSOLE WITH FRIENDS: "I decided I wanted to do something that Omaha had never seen before, something really big, and I did it."

struction in March.

He said he got the idea last year when he was creating the "Train of Terror," a Halloween ride at Peony Park.

Losole said that he will close the Fright Zone right after Halloween and begin remodeling and changing the interior for next year.

How stable and long-lasting can a business be that is scheduled to stay open only 31 days a year?

"I'm going to be here a long time," he said. "I have a one-year lease but five years of options. I am locked in this year and next year, and I will be starting construction on a second house in November."

The second haunted house will be in a West Omaha shopping center that Losole said he doesn't want to identify yet; it will have 48,000 square feet of space.

"We assume we are going to put anywhere from 30,000 to 50,000 people through the Fright Zone," he said. "I'd like to see this a break-even year."

Helping pay the expenses, which include 65 employees, is a concession stand and merchandise shop.

Most of the employees are teenagers who serve as the monsters and guides; Losole also employs off-duty policemen and an off-duty Omaha firefighter.

Losole said his main business continues to be Yard Art, which has outgrown

its space in downtown Omaha and will be moved to 5,500 square feet next door to Fright Zone.

The company now sells patterns to 2,800 retail stores.

Losole also continues another business, that of decorating buildings, houses and shopping centers for Christmas.

Losole said that the not-for-profit haunted houses have nothing to fear. He said he is not out to corner the market on the haunted house business and directs customers to other houses when they finish at the Fright Zone.

"There's enough room out there for 10 haunted houses," he said.