

MAKING HAY

By CARLA CHANCE
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Georgia Joy of Pacific Junction was literally "grasping at straws" when she and her husband, Darrol, established Heritage Trails on their farm nearly nine years ago.

The Pacific Junction farm is the famed local site of haunted hay rides. Tales of its spookiness have even reached far and wide — thanks to a CNN broadcast about the family's rides a few years ago.

But to reach this point, the couple had to overcome a financial crunch in 1985 when they almost lost the farm.

"This farm has been in my family for over 100 years," said Georgia. "We were in mediation for foreclosure. Things were really tight. My husband lost a really good job he had for 9 1/2 years."

Another obstacle was that 120 of the farm's 138 acres are covered with timber.

"There was very little revenue in trees," she said. But the Joys came up with a unique idea incorporating their trees.

The Joys did that by opening their farm in the Loess hills to

hayrides. But they wanted to give the rides a different — and scary — twist.

The couple succeeded in saving the farm through their frightful rides.

Georgia said people should be prepared to expect the unexpected as the Joys' family and neighbors suit up in costumes to frighten unsuspecting riders along the way.

Along with "Jason," who's become a permanent resident, riders may spot the Loch Ness Monster, scenes from a monster wedding, and an area where "body parts" are stored, she said.

The haunted rides have become so popular the Joys now hold them from October to mid-November.

"There aren't enough days in October to give everyone a haunted ride," she said.

But like most places in the area, the Joys also hold the hay rides throughout the year.

"I think people like to get out in the country and see what people used to do for fun," she said.

Karen Nielsen, who co-owns Shady Lane Ranch Inc. along with her husband, Charles, agreed.

The Niensens, who rent and



Nonpareil/Buzz Orr

Kyle Wiese, front left, and other workers shown dressed in their monster costumes Wednesday afternoon at the Heritage Trails hayrack rides.

sell horses, have been holding hay rides on their property north of Council Bluffs for about 20 years.

Autumn also seems to be their busiest season.

"Come September and October, everyone wants a hay ride. It's just a nice, outdoor activity. The weather is crisp and cool and everybody enjoys getting out," Karen said.

But the Niensens, who own 360 wooded acres crisscrossed by horse trails, also hold hay rides from early spring to late November.

Some prefer day rides, especially in the fall where they can observe the changing season and autumn colors.

Others prefer starry nights where at the end of the ride they

can linger or cook around a cozy fire, she said.

While some parties like to ambush each other with hay, others simply like to watch the scenery go by.

But the bottom line, according to Karen, is "everybody that comes here has a really good time."

Hay rides just seemed to be a natural extension for Jane Connealy, proprietor of Terra Jane, a country bed and breakfast located east of Council Bluffs.

The former school teacher, charmed by the country, established the inn about 5 1/2 years ago.

"I guess I wanted to create an environment to share with my children and the public in a nat-

ural setting.

"Farmland felt real comfortable and safe to me because I grew up in a farm in Nebraska," she said.

Finding the perfect location took her awhile, Connealy said.

"I drove around in the country for three years in Nebraska and Iowa and knocked on doors."

But she also had Realtors looking for her before she found the 110-year-old farm house on the hill with a magnificent view of Iowa's rolling hills.

Connealy, who also who holds dances in a barn down from the inn, said she began offering hay rides about three years ago.

Vastly aware of their tremendous appeal, she said one weekend she was host to between 1,000 and 1,200 people who rode

the trails throughout her eight acres.

Autumn also seems to be her busiest season.

"People are looking for an outdoor gathering before the winter comes. It's just kind of a tradition for many groups here," she said.

No matter which place seems most appealing, all three offer tractor-driven rides and with a minimum requirement of 20 people. Riders also have the option of bringing their own food and refreshments. A slow-burning campfire at the end of the ride is also provided.

For those headed for a ride, remember — if it's hot, don't forget the bug spray. And if it's cool and crisp, don't forget something or someone to keep you warm.