

Candidates preside as ghouls parade

By Tom Vaught

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HOLMES BEACH – With election day only days away, John McCain and Barack Obama came to Anna Maria Island to stump for those undecided votes. Of course, they had to march in the Anna Maria Elementary School parade and attend the Fall Festival on the school grounds and then, if they got their homework and chores done, they went outside to do their thing. It was probably to play, not politic.

It was, in reality, the AME annual costume contest, parade and the two candidates were much shorter than they appeared on television. Joey Thiel played Barack Obama and Leo Teelli played John McCain, and thanks to some realistic rubber masks, they made great parade marshals as they rode in the electric cart that bore a sign in back reading, "And we approve this message."

Credit Joey's mom, Kelly Thiel, for the candidates in the car. She and dozens of other parents pulled off what many would consider a miracle for the way the economy is. According to PTO President Caroline Pardue, the Fall Fest made around \$13,000, up from last year's total of \$12,793. The money goes for the PTO program to support the students and staff.

"I get goose bumps thinking we brought in that much because we thought we would only make around \$10,000," Pardue said. "We would have been happy making \$8,000."

Pardue said they had a lot of people to thank, including the businesses and individuals who donated prizes.

"We didn't have that many prizes a couple of weeks ago," she said, "but we ended up with 250."

She also praised Glen Grizzaffe, a friend of parent Joe Pandolpho, for giving the school around 150 large pumpkins, which the PTO sold for \$10 each. He said as of Monday, there were only two left.

Before the parade, judges determined which boy and girl had the best costume in each class. It was a difficult decision for most, as the kids and their parents showed a lot of imagination in their costumes.

After they arrived at the school, the kids enjoyed the cooler temperatures as they played games and climbed the rock wall, jumped in the bounce house and enjoyed other concessions. Inside, there were tables with baked goods and Joe Rogers and crew from the Sandbar restaurant served lunch to the people in line.

Pardue also praised the parents who built the haunted house in the auditorium.

"That took a lot of work and it was really fun to go through," she said.



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Clockwise, left Kelly Thiel as Cruella and Stephanie Fischer as Little Red Riding Hood wait for the parade from the Island Chamber of Commerce to the school to begin. Rob Hicks (above) was the Incredible Hulk and Dr. Roger Danziger was Spider Man. Juliet Greene (below right) was a doctor and the parade honorees below left) were Barack Obama, played by Joey thiel, and John McCain, played by Leo Teelli.



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Kids from Miss Kinnan's class march behind their class banner in the parade.