

Jack-O-Lantern Spectacular

The Jack-O-Lantern Spectacular returns to Roger Williams Park Zoo from September 29 - October 31. This year will celebrate 75 years of television, featuring carvings from iconic shows and magical moments in broadcast history. There will also be pumpkins commemorating the 150th anniversary of the zoo. The annual event will bring approximately 6,000 pumpkins and an estimated 140,000 spectators (170,000 attended in 2021). Proceeds support the Zoo's ongoing animal care, education programs and conservation initiatives.

"I try to brainstorm and figure out the theme in the winter," says **Passion for Pumpkins** founder **John Reckner**. "It's always a challenge to come up with something different every year. There's a lot of nostalgia with the television theme. There will be a little something for everybody."

The Jack-O-Lantern Spectacular offers four family nights and two sensory-friendly nights. The family nights will have meet and greets with costumed characters for those waiting in line for the pumpkin trail. Tuesdays October 11 and 18 will be Fairy Tale Nights and Wednesdays October 12 and 19 will be Super Hero Nights. And yes, coming in costume is welcomed for all ages. Sensory-Friendly Nights, which won't have music or special effects, will take place Tuesday, October 25 and Wednesday, October 26 from 5 - 6 pm.

"We get the pumpkins September 12 and the 20 carvers will have a mad drawing session," Reckner says when discussing the process. The pumpkins, grown by **Ron Wallace** of **Wallace Organic Wonder** in Coventry, weigh as much as 2,000 pounds.

A unique way to view the Jack-O-Lantern Spectacular is to take the Soaring Eagle Zip Ride, which soars 115 feet above the ground, providing an eagle's eye view of the pumpkins. There are no advance sales and only 40 tickets are sold each hour, so interested parties should plan their time accordingly. Patrons can purchase tickets in addition to admission to the Spectacular.

"Between the illuminated artwork, background lighting and 14 musical skits, we strive to have an impact on your senses," Reckner says. "People come from all over the country to attend this event. We're a celebration of autumn."

The Jack-O-Lantern Spectacular runs from September 29 - October 31 at Roger Williams Park Zoo. Please visit rwpzoo.org/jols for more information.