

# Something wicked this way comes: The Halloween House entertains trick or treaters for over 20 years

by Madelaine Gerard, Staff Writer  
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**BETHALTO** – For **Steve O'Dell and Betty Orlando**, Halloween is the most wonderful time of the year.

Over the past 24 years, the two have been decking out their house, located at **118 E. Central St. in Bethalto**, with some of the most intricate and innovative decorations that they can get their hands on.

Known by trick or treaters and other area residents as “**The Halloween House**,” the entire display has grown throughout the decades from two simple items: Frankenstein and the Bride of Frankenstein masks.

“It all began when our youngest son, Ben, was born 24 years ago. I happened to be up in the middle of the night with him because he needed to be fed. I turned on the TV and there was QVC with what just happened to be Frankenstein and Bride of Frankenstein masks,” Orlando said. “I called in really quick and thought, if I could get them both, great, but if I could only get one or the other, I wouldn’t even bother. I ended up getting them both.”

The masks remained stowed away until a few days before Halloween. That fateful evening, Steve came home from work, quite “bummed out” from the day’s events, and Betty decided it would be great to surprise him with the masks and plan their first haunt.

“On Halloween night, I put on my wedding gown and he put on his tux,” Orlando said. “That’s how the whole thing got started.”



In the decades since, the pair decided to try their hand at creating some of their own spooky props. The first of which began with the large spider web display that is draped between the two trees on their front yard. From there, a large-scale cemetery formed over the yard’s west lawn with extremely intricate details and surprisingly, actual epitaphs are painted or carved into the tombstones.

“We found a book about using Flexstone paint and started by using some garbage lumber for the first few. It turned out so good. We started using a book called ‘The Best of Gravestone Humor.’” Orlando said. “Each epitaph back there is a real epitaph. From there, each year we added more and more. One weighs about 70 pounds.”

“Betty did all of the artwork on those,” O’Dell said. “She has the magic touch. She coordinates stuff, has the talents to do the lettering on that and is quite talented.”



The Halloween House continued to grow with several different scenes, thousands of props and innovations galore.

“There’s stuff to see on both sides of the house,” O’Dell said. “A lot of the time, the kids drag their parents and say, ‘mom, mom, over here!’”

This year, the family is introducing a new scene on the porch that can only be described as “the mad scientist’s laboratory.”

O’Dell and Orlando looked to Pinterest for some of their decoration ideas and found a stone wall façade project. The completed panels, which look incredibly realistic, were posted up on the front porch’s exterior walls. All and all, each panel took about 10 hours of work each.



For this year’s scene, O’Dell and his youngest son worked diligently to build and program a new prop that can only be described as a talking “franken-skeleton” with a sinister laugh and piercing, glowing eyes.

The two work hard to make sure programming works correctly and that all parts are working in concision to ensure that the prop is ready for the trick or treaters.

“It was Betty’s idea. We were over at the Halloween convention over in St. Louis, Transworld, she saw these talking heads over there and got this idea and basically, started running with it and this is the result,” O’Dell said.

Over the past 24 years that the duo has been decorating The Halloween House, the kids are always at the forefront of their designs. The displays never display any intense gore or satanic figures. Instead of being frightened, the goal is always to intrigue and amaze the guests with the details involved.

“I’d say my favorite part about Halloween night is when there are so many people in the yard that you can barely walk around,” O’Dell said. “It’s excellent and makes it worth it. You hear people talking and commenting about what they liked, saying ‘how did they do this’ or ‘wow, look at this!’”

It’s all Halloween magic, the family says. When the magic is over, however, they take a few months off until the next Transworld show in March to begin planning their next haunt. Though the hours of hard work and months of preparation for two nights of trick or treating can be quite difficult, the family hopes that The Halloween House will continue for years to come.

“It’s trying at times and it can be hard,” O’Dell said, “But overall, it’s worth it.





[Charles Thomas also contributed to this story.](#)