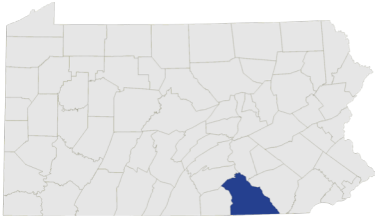


# My Story



## York's Newest Community Event Heritage Rail Trail County Park

By Gwenyth Loose, York County Rail Trail Authority

***"The Heritage Rail Trail has become the go-to facility for planning and staging a successful event."***



On a nearly full moon Saturday evening in October, the small borough of Seven Valleys welcomed nearly 5,000 visitors to enjoy a quarter-mile section of the Heritage Rail Trail County Park. At 6 pm the 2016 Pumpkin Walk officially began.

Earlier in the day, a dedicated group of volunteers, assisted by local Boy and Girl Scouts and retirement community residents, placed over 250 hand-carved pumpkins along the rail trail. Now, as darkness approached, cars were backing up along all roads leading to this small community and parking lots were approaching capacity. Would the small crew of traffic and parking volunteers be able to handle the quickly growing issue of moving the flow of visitors from their cars to the rail trail? An answer came several days after the event when a Borough resident commented at the local



**Keystone Fund Investment:** \$90,000

**Total Public/Private Investment:** \$1 million

post office that not a single car horn was sounded that evening.

For many years, the York County Rail Trail Authority debated whether its ten-member board and one staff person could muster a committee to host an annual fund-

raising event. In 2015, we gave it a try and met more success than we could handle, as the event went viral on social media and attracted over 2,000 visitors. Early in 2016, a decision was made to repeat the even, but we would plan, organize, and prepare for thousands. The 2016 Pumpkin Walk committee boosted its numbers to fifteen dedicated volunteers, each with specific assignments. Soon charts lined the meeting room walls, web pages were developed, and all members dug in to tackle the logistics of bringing thousands of visitors to a small

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section of the Heritage Rail Trail for a three-hour event. And it worked!

Traffic lined up again, but now volunteers--decked out in safety equipment--were ready to direct visitors to two planned entrances. White canopy tents marked the entrances. Over 250 donated pumpkins brightly illuminated a quarter mile section of the rail trail. A costumed Pumpkin Lady handed out pumpkin stickers to all children, as they approached a pavilion where picnic tables were piled high with bags of donated cookies and popcorn. Homemade soup, hot dogs, and hot beverages were waiting for purchase inside the local fire company. The 2016 Heritage Rail Trail Pumpkin Walk was a real hometown success!

The committee met in early November to evaluate this year's event and make tentative plans for a 2017 event. Members reflected on how such a simple fall walk could become so popular. The answers highlighted the basic characteristics of the Heritage Rail Trail: an absence of motorized traffic, smooth walking surface, gentle or no grades, ADA accessibility, and interesting surroundings of forest and fields.

These are the same coveted features recognized by many area non-profit organizations that have chosen the Heritage Rail Trail as a preferred venue for hosting their fund-raising events. Every year, a growing number of local YMCA and YWCA, churches, scout groups, and health agencies schedule annual fund-raising events on the Heritage Rail Trail. Not only do these events raise awareness of worthy causes, but they also provide annual revenue to sustain these



agencies. The Heritage Rail Trail has become the go-to facility for planning and staging a successful event. Through these successes, many non-profit agencies gain public recognition and are financially sustained. The Rail Trail Authority is proud to be the developer of the Heritage Rail Trail and grateful to the York community for embracing the Heritage Rail Trail and its newest event, the Pumpkin Walk.

**[Learn more at KeystoneFund.org.](http://KeystoneFund.org)**