

“Pumpkin people” invade the countryside

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STEWARTSTOWN — About this time every year, as the moon grows round and bright and the nights turn chilly, mysterious creatures begin popping up around the countryside.

They appear part human and part alien, part scary and part comical. Some have cornsilk hanks of hair and others show round, orange, bald pates. Some wear colorful clothes, while others bare more. Usually they turn up among crackly cornshocks, piles of colorful, oddly-shaped gourds and clusters of bright Indian corn.

Even their pets come along: butternut squash piglets, neck-pumpkin geese, elongated-gourd snakes, Snoopy of Peanuts cartoon fame and the provocative Miss Piggy.

“Pumpkin people” are turning up all over these days, at retail farm markets, countryside stands, even downtown front porches.

Few displays of the decorative and amusing pumpkin characters have as long a history as the one at Red Rooster Farm, just south of Stewartstown, owned by Lois and Spencer Hammond.

Leafing through a seed catalog nearly twenty years ago, Spencer Hammond spotted a picture of a “pumpkin house,” a structure featuring lots of shelves in a small building for displaying pumpkins.

The Hammonds farm a hundred acres, about half of it in vegetables for their retail farm market, and several acres of pumpkins. The

orange cooking, baking, and decorative vegetables have always been a major seasonal item at Red Rooster Farm market, and Hammond figured his own version of a pumpkin house would help catch the interest of visiting customers.

That house, filled with colorful pumpkins, proved such a success that the idea developed into a seasonal creative project for Hammond, prime designer of his pumpkin people displays.

While the pumpkin house has returned, year after year, other ideas for characters from pumpkins and gourds expanded into several corners of the yard, parking and sales stand area.

This year’s display numbers are down just a bit, but ten creative pumpkin pictorals surround the market. They range from a grizzled mountain man guarding his pumpkin “still” to a trio of singers rehearsing “ghostly tunes.” As much as possible, the displays are designed life size.

Red Rooster’s pumpkin people have proved an extremely popular drawing card, with hundreds of visitors yearly. Many of them are groups of children from elementary to nursery school ages, traveling often 20 miles or more to view the amusing, cheery array of Hammond’s pumpkin characters.

“I used to show each display, one by one, to each group that visited,” relates Lois Hammond, who manages the retail market while her husband and employees handle the full-time job of producing,



Trio of Pumpkin choristors harmonizes a rendition of “Ghostly tunes,” including “That Old Black Magic..”



Cider might be the brew of the season, but this “Grandpa” prefers the distilled essence of pumpkin. Is that an IRS ghost in the back?

picking and hauling in the daily harvests. “Now I just tell them about the displays, and they can go look at them on their own.”

She also makes a point of mentioning to adult leaders of such groups the work involved in food production, and its relatively inexpensive cost compared to that in other countries.

Hammond’s retail market is open, seven days weekly, from July through October. A complete line of seasonal produce opens with early sweet corn and continues through the fall harvest of pumpkins, squash, and decorative

items like ornamental corn and gourds. Peppers, sweet potatoes, beans, eggplant and cantaloupes are among the market’s many offerings. At the end of October, the market stand is closed and Hammond turns his attention to

harvesting the corn crop - while pondering new pumpkin people ideas as he gathers the grain.

Red Rooster Farm’s pumpkin display can be seen through October, seven days weekly, south of Stewartstown on Route 24.



Perched in the shadow of a cornstalk, two-year-old Adam Coles, of Cockeysville, Md., grins as he ponders all the delicious pies represented by these pumpkins.



The naughty but lovely Miss Piggy reigns over the Hammond pumpkin kingdom.



Spencer Hammond’s delightful seasonal display began nearly two decades ago when he patterned a pumpkin house after a seed catalog photo. Some toddlers find the wicked witch on the roof just a bit scary.