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Saturday, October 25, 2008

# Halloween spending a great escape

### Consumers cope with gloomy economics by celebrating

Jennifer Youssef / The Detroit News

The economy may be downright scary, but it's not spooking consumers away from the chills and thrills of one of their favorite fall pastimes: Halloween.

Halloween celebrations and spending are expected to rise slightly this year, despite consumer belt-tightening in the wake of record high [gas prices](#) this summer, falling house values and credit woes. Consumers are willing to spend a little more, experts say, because All Hallows Eve offers a temporary escape from the gloomy economy.

"Consumers -- who have been anxious and uncertain for the past several months -- may be looking at Halloween as an opportunity to forget the stresses of daily life and just have a little fun," said Tracy Mullin, president and CEO of the National Retail Federation.

Advertisement

Sixty-five percent of consumers plan to celebrate Halloween this year, up from 59 percent last year, according to a survey by BIGresearch, a Worthington, Ohio-based firm that conducts research for retailers. Average per-person spending is expected to increase to \$66.54, up from \$64.82 a year ago.

Overall Halloween spending on costumes, decorations, candy and cards is expected to jump to \$5.77 billion, from \$5.07 billion last year, making it one of the few bright spots for the nation's anxious retailers and the second biggest holiday, behind only the \$470 billion Christmas season.

"Halloween growth is off the charts," said Mike Bernacchi, an economics professor at University of Detroit Mercy. "It's just eye-popping. Everybody looks for a good, cheap time. It's the ultimate escapism holiday."

And despite Michigan's tanking economy, retail sales across the state are expected to mirror those nationally.

"People are still spending on Halloween. (The market) isn't saturated yet," said Tom Scott, senior vice president of the Michigan Retailers Association.

### A no-stress diversion

The uptick in spending mirrors the 2002 Halloween, when anxious consumers escaped the economic downturn and global events by going to parties, enjoying trick-or-treaters, carving pumpkins and decorating their homes.

For many, Halloween is among the least stressful -- no gift-giving involved -- and most social of holidays -- people want to buy costumes and join in the revelry, experts said.

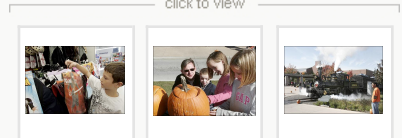
"People do look for diversion and focus on something less depressing," said Richard Divine, professor of marketing at Central Michigan University.

The retail federation predicted consumers this year will spend an average of \$24.17 on Halloween costumes, \$20.39 on candy, \$18.25 on decorations and \$3.73 on [greeting cards](#).

"The most surprising thing is that people are planning to spend more when they were expected to hold on to their money tighter," said Pam Goodfellow, a senior analyst at



Braden Threlfar, 8, searches for costumes recently in Allen Park. Halloween spending is expected to jump to \$5.77 billion, from \$5.07 billion last year. (Ankur Dholakia / The Detroit News)



### More information

#### Top Halloween costumes

Consumers will spend an average \$24.17 on costumes.

#### Kids

1. Princess
2. Witch
3. Hannah Montana
4. Spider-man
5. Pirate

#### Adults

1. Witch
2. Pirate
3. Vampire
4. Cat
5. Fairy or nurse

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BIGresearch.

The only Halloween activity less appealing this year is haunted houses, mostly because of admission prices, according to the BIGresearch survey.

Halloween displays at Meijer stores are more elaborate than ever this year, with the Grand Rapids-based retailer bracing for a rush in customers buying all things Halloween, said Frank Guglielmi, a company spokesman.

"We should do well this Halloween," he said.

### Fridays good for holiday

Anthony Jakielek, owner of Vintage House banquet hall in Fraser, is expecting more guests for the Halloween party he's hosting because the holiday falls on a Friday. Last year about 300 people attended, but he expects between 500 and 700 this year.

Stephanie Puertas, owner of Stay & Play Social Club Detroit, a Royal Oak firm that organizes sports leagues and sponsors the annual Boo Bash at Royal Oak Music Theatre, said the economy isn't going to deter guests. She estimates 700 to 800 people will be there again this year.

"We're pretty consistent and expect the same as last year," she said.

The dour economy also isn't going to stop Southfield resident Andy Stern, 32, from spending this Halloween.

He's hosting 20 to 30 guests at his house and plans to spend about \$200 on a keg of beer, firewood for a campfire and decorations. "I don't even like Halloween," he said. "It's just an excuse to get people together."

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