

Kids growing pumpkins

St. Joseph's youth group sponsors Pumpkin Patch

By **Linda Sailer** lsailer@thedickinsonpress.com

If you go What: St. Joseph's Pumpkin Patch

Where: St. Joseph's Catholic Church west lawn

When: 11:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 18

Locally grown pumpkins of all shapes, colors and sizes are being harvested in time for a fundraiser for the St. Joseph's Catholic Church youth group. The group will hold its annual Pumpkin Patch on Sunday, Oct. 18. "The kids do all the work themselves," youth leader Tammie Braun said. "The kids come out to the field to plant the seeds. Once or twice in the summer, they pull any major weeds. Once the pumpkins get established, they take care of themselves. When it's time to harvest, we'll all go out, cut the vines and haul them into town with trucks."

Shane and Bernie Spradley donated the land for the pumpkins on their farm 10 miles south of Dickinson. They had the space. But, many of the rain showers missed their farm this summer, so they resorted to well water. "I used two sprinklers elevated above the ground," she said. "One sprinkler watered all night, and then the next night, I used the other sprinkler. The pumpkins have had a mild frost, but the longer you leave them out there, the better. They are turning really orange, like a traditional jack-o'-lantern. We hope to keep doing it as long as there's a youth group."

Several St. Joseph's parish members also donated garden space in town to raise pumpkins. Those pumpkins are being stored in the parish garage. "It has been a good year for growing pumpkins," Braun said. "Last year, we ended up buying pumpkins because we were short. We made less money, but we didn't run out of pumpkins."

The size of pumpkins varies. But for the most part, the pumpkins are mature and ready for fall desserts or decorating for Halloween. "It's fun to watch the little ones look for their perfect pumpkin," Braun said. "It doesn't matter what mom says. And I think the grandmas and grandpas enjoy it just as much."

As a family activity, the Pumpkin Patch is an opportunity for children to play carnival games, jump on the jumping castle and to have their photo taken. In addition, lunch will be served, consisting of sausage on a stick, knoephla soup and fried bread.

"What's fun about it, is to see the kids and grandkids running around picking out the biggest pumpkin they can find," youth member Rebecca Steckler said. "It's fun seeing the young ones' smiles and jumping in the jumping castle."

While Halloween pumpkins can be purchased in stores, it's not the same as one that's been locally grown, Braun said. "These pumpkins were grown from the hearts of these kids," she said. "These kids are not asking for a handout. They've done all the work to raise their own money for their own entertainment."

Proceeds from the Pumpkin Patch support youth group activities for the entire year. The group meets 6:45 p.m. Wednesdays and is open to students in grades seven to 12.

“Father Keith (Streifel) feeds them spiritually, and the kids have a good time in a non-judgemental atmosphere,” Braun said. “There’s definitely more room for kids. We graduated a few seniors and there’s a large group of seventh graders coming in.”

The group uses the money to cover activities. “We always take kids to the Hills Alive at Rapid City, so that’s a big need for fundraiser,” she said. “What is left over goes to buy snacks throughout the year.”

Braun has been involved with the youth group for five years. “It’s totally volunteer — I want those kids to know adults love them and I want to spend time seeing them, so they know they are valued,” she said. While the Pumpkin Patch is a fundraiser, it has a greater purpose for the parish, Rev. Streifel said. “It’s something for the children to do, it’s a way to reach out to the whole community, it’s a beautiful thing,” he said.

Sailer is the lifestyles editor of The Dickinson Press. Call her at 701-456-1209.