

# A HALLOWEEN NIGHT RIDE

Hear spooky tales, eat candy aboard a haunted trolley

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FOR THE DAILY ASTORIAN

**T**he setting: the Astoria Riverfront Trolley. The time: 6:30 p.m. Halloween.

Dressed in cobwebs and inhabited by ghosts, bats and skeletons, the trolley will take off near 17th Street — loaded with passengers and a conductor and driver in costume — and travel along the Astoria Riverwalk. Those who dare can join the thrilling one-hour night ride and hear spooky tales while indulging on candy.

“We just have a blast with it,” said Paul Winiarz, a member of the trolley operations board.

Originally, the complimentary Halloween Night Run was part of a larger tradition that included a Halloween bash at the Astoria Armory and a night of spooky movies, activities and food for families at Rogue Ales Public House. The trolley ride took place between festivities.

When the Rogue discontinued the event, however, the trolley ride was already “such a ritual, we decided we would carry on,” Winiarz said.

## ‘Time to get theatrical’

One of the trolley operators, who had a knack for telling ghost stories, introduced storytelling into the Halloween Night Run. For the past two years, North Coast children’s author Melissa Eskue Ousley — who uses locations in and around Clatsop County as the backdrop for some of her work — took on the job of entertaining passengers as they traveled from 17th Street, near the Columbia River Maritime Museum, to 39th Street, then to the Riverwalk Inn and back.

This year, the storytelling baton passes to Ilwaco, Washington, resident William Ham, a community theater actor, radio host at KMUN and Coast Weekend contributor, who anticipates using his experience to deliver a unique performance.

“Halloween is always a great time to get theatrical and to do something off the beaten path,” he said.

Entertaining the audience, pulling them into the spirit of the event, is what motivates him.

“It’s nice to bring an audience along with whatever story you’re trying to tell,



PHOTO BY JOSHUA BESSEX

Costumed riders of all ages fill the Astoria Riverfront Trolley during the Halloween Night Run in 2015.

whether it’s a play or a reading or something along these lines,” he said. “It’s gratifying when you get an audience in the palm of your hand.”

The unpredictability of a live performance aboard a haunted trolley may require a certain spontaneity. Ham sees this as part of the fun — and a way to bond with the crowd. A child-packed audience and the special setting also make the Halloween Night Run a rare opportunity for him.

“That’s probably part of the reason I’m psyched about doing this, because it is a little bit different,” he said. “And kids, of course, are sometimes the best audience when you’re telling stories or performing. They are so open to things. You get them on your side, and they’ll follow you anywhere.”


The crew decorates the trolley about a week before Halloween, so people who don’t take the Halloween ride can still see it decked out during a regular weekend ride.

## A community courtesy

The Astoria Riverfront Trolley, a self-sustaining nonprofit, tries to offer free rides on Halloween — and, typically, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s as well — as a treat to local residents. Those are occasions when locals often have family and guests visiting from elsewhere, and they can experience Astoria in a way only accessible via the trolley.

“It’s our way to give back to the community,” Winiarz said.

The trolley, built in 1913 and fondly known as “Old 300,” is operated by about 40 certified conductors and motormen who are all volunteers. During the summer, it runs six hours a day, seven days per week, at \$1 per ride. In the fall, the trolley usually operates on weekends, weather permitting.

This year, Winiarz said, except for a few special events, the trolley will shut down for winter after Halloween for engine maintenance. Runs should resume in late February or early March. 



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Operators combine their official uniforms with costumes to take the Astoria Riverfront Trolley out for its annual Halloween Night Run, a complimentary offering for the public.