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WHAT THE PUMPKIN PATCH MEANS TO ME
by Laurie Stewart Otten

David and I joined the Hills Church in May of 1985, with the expectation that we would, at some time, in some capacity, serve the church. David grew up as a missionary kid, and I grew up in a church-going household where Mom was treasurer of the Christmas Bazaar and the Rummage Sale. So, serving was a given. We served on this committee and that, as time permitted, as well as singing in the choir or teaching Sunday School.

In the spring of 2003, Rev. Ann Adams invited me to have lunch with her, and to talk about helping her with a project she was considering: the Pumpkin Patch. What I didn't know was that she had already talked to the Outreach Committee about it, and she had put together a team. The only thing she was missing was a "Pumpkin Chair" – or as I now prefer to call it, a "Pumpkin Queen!" I had chaired the Rummage Sale, as well as a committee or two, so perhaps she thought I might be able to handle this. She didn't know that I would fall in love with this particular project. But I did.

I spoke with Tina Andersson (another Pumpkin Queen) the other day about what we love about the Pumpkin Patch. I love this project. We love this project. Because it is a synthesis of so many wonderful things: It's a great family activity. It's an opportunity for the community around us to get to know our church community. It's a chance to get to know someone new, or a chance to get to know someone you've known for a long time in a deeper way by working – and playing – alongside each other in a glorious mix of abilities, talents and generations.

There's something for everybody and anybody who wants to help, whether for an hour, a day, or the whole two weeks! I've seen teens and tweens gain confidence interacting with adults, by waiting on customers. I've watched little ones take pride in carrying pumpkins in their arms –and teaching others to HUG their pumpkins instead of carrying them by the stems! I've watched a woman with a chronic disabling disease absorbed in the task of explaining how the funds will be used, forgetting for a moment what is ailing her that day. I've met new members and worked alongside long timers. And all of this in service to a greater good.

We've raised money so that our teens could build a house in Belize. We've funded a van for an agency that desperately needed one. We've provided camperships for low-income kids. These are just some of the worthwhile projects that Pumpkin Patch has funded. Along the way we've made

friends in the community, we've gotten to know each other better, we've worked hard, had fun, and we've shared directly and indirectly what it means to serve as God's hands in the world.

What could be better?