



## History of the Autumn Lights Festival

### JUNGLE HABITAT

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[autumnlightsfestival.com](http://autumnlightsfestival.com)

### ALF, Then and Now...

West Milford Township's "Autumn Lights Festival" started in 1994. Before being located on Union Valley Road, ALF was spread out all over town with different civic organizations and businesses hosting individual events on a joint schedule. It has also been held on the front lawn of Town Hall, while other activity locations including the former A&P parking lot, West Milford Elks Lodge, Pinecliff Dam parking lot, Veterans' Park, the former Rockport Plaza, Browns Point, Greenwood Lake Airport, and Long Pond Ironworks have been utilized. The event was forced to move to Ridge Road near Town Center when the Marshall Hill Road bridge was being rebuilt in 2019.

ALF had always been a volunteer-run event before the COVID pandemic. Once the volunteer committee disbanded and the event was in jeopardy of being terminated, the Township procured an experienced public events vendor to assume the operation and keep ALF going. **This event continues to be self-sustaining with no tax dollars spent.** Fortunately, ALF has been so successful that its scale has expanded beyond the current location, scope, and logistical constraints that it MUST be relocated for the upcoming event in September 2024.

After a deep dive into ALF's history, it is clear that the event needs a larger space. Township law enforcement and event organizers have had concerns about the safety and feasibility of this event in the Union Valley Road location dating back to 2018\* (***see link below***). Over the past thirty years and twenty-eight events (two years were canceled due to COVID), the event has moved locations no less than four times as it has expanded in attendance and activities.

The point is this: as ALF has grown, so has the need for more space and activities. The Township's elected officials, administrative staff, and festival producer recognize that the event is unsustainable in its current location and format - and are acting to ensure this staple of West Milford's annual calendar can thrive for decades.

ALF's new format and location allow this festival to continue to improve and expand, creating new experiences and memories for West Milford's residents. This decision brings the event from a **"street fair" to a true "festival"** and better accommodates the tens of thousands of annual attendees moving from 2024 into the future. West Milford Township and the festival producer are immensely excited and feel honored to deliver a state-of-the-art and ever-evolving social and entertainment experience to the residents of West Milford Township and guests from surrounding communities to sustain this festival for years to come!



## Common Questions, Clarifications & Answers

### Why is the Autumn Lights Festival moving?

The decision to relocate the Autumn Lights Festival (hereinafter, "ALF") is due to numerous logistical constraints at the current venue, including restrictions on capacity, access for emergency services personnel, and attractions for attendees.



### Setup/Cleanup Challenges

Event setup can only occur within a limited window a few hours before the event is open to the public due to restrictions on closing Union Valley Road, only to be followed by a two-hour window to get the road completely cleared and cleaned so it can be reopened for motorists (as per County guidelines). The event in its current location creates multiple road closures, requires numerous permits, reroutes NJ Transit busses, closes access to every single business on the busiest road in town, upsets Shop-Rite Plaza, and allows just two hours to clean up the road and reopen it after having 350 vendors clear their booths and ALF staff remove trash and debris - and this all must be done after dark.

### Safety Concerns

Besides the restrictions on emergency services access previously stated, the current location does not offer any ground where vendors can secure their tents for safety purposes. There have been multiple instances since ALF returned to Union Valley Road where high winds have lifted vendor tents and blown them into the narrow walkway where attendees could have been injured. Also, ALF has been grateful to be able to utilize the Pinecliff Dam parking area, but the material composition of the lot is not conducive to safely securing the children's amusements.





## **Space Constraints**

ALF must be relocated because the current festival space (Union Valley Road between Shop-Rite Plaza and Bearfort Road) cannot sustain 30,000+ attendees in a ½ mile long stretch of road. The current location offers ONLY 50,000 square feet with a 20-foot-wide walking path to accommodate all the attendees, event signs, decorations, trash and recycling receptacles, and advertisements. These constraints do not allow ALF staff or police, fire, and EMS services easy access to respond to any situations that may arise and require their attention.



## **Why WAS the event moving to Lincoln Avenue & Wallisch Homestead?**

ALF was being relocated for the above reasons. Lincoln Avenue and Wallisch Homestead, which is owned by the Township and Board of Education, were thought to be an ideal placement for this expanding event. However, the Township was informed by the New Jersey Department of Transportation (hereinafter, "DOT") that Lincoln Avenue needed a state-ordered bridge and culvert repair. DOT could not guarantee a start date for the infrastructure improvement to the roadway, and early decisions must be made to ensure the success of the event. After a thorough review of alternate locations complying with state regulations and general safety guidelines, the Township and festival producer have determined that the former Jungle Habitat property off Airport Road (hereinafter, "Jungle Habitat") provides the best grounds for the event's success.



## **Why is ALF officially moving to Jungle Habitat?**

Given the above-mentioned constraints eliminating the prior space on Union Valley Road from future consideration and the anticipated DOT closing of Lincoln Avenue by the Wallisch Homestead - in conjunction with resident feedback - West Milford's elected officials, administrative staff, and experienced festival producer have determined that Jungle Habitat is the ONLY venue that offers the capacity and weatherproof space to continue hosting ALF moving forward. The Township and festival producer are committed to delivering a top-notch community event to West Milford's residents while acclimating and adjusting to its annually increasing popularity and imminent need to grow with the entertainment and attractions of ALF to benefit all attendees. In plain terms, ALF has outgrown the Union Valley Road location. Frankly, this is a WONDERFUL credit to how vibrant West Milford has become... and the main local attraction each Fall needs to grow with its audience!



## Why make ALF a weekend-long event?

Planning a festival like ALF is a massive undertaking. For all the hard work that goes into preparing for and setting up the event, seven hours is a short window for the necessary costs and extensive logistics. Making ALF a three-day event allows vendors the potential to triple their income. It allows the festival to triple its growth and substantially increase revenues, allowing greater charitable contributions back to the community from the festival producer. A three-day festival allows attendees multiple days to enjoy the event, rather than only being able to attend in one seven-hour window. Last year, the rain date was activated, and the attendance was greater than it was the year prior on a Saturday.



With a three-day festival, we can accommodate an increased attendance and share all the joy of ALF with a larger audience of our friends and neighbors around the area. The longer festival hours will allow for evening light displays to bring back the original history of why ALF was founded (contrary to popular opinion, it was NOT for the traffic light, but rather for the light-up decorations that were used by the residents and businesses in the Town Center during the festival).



Discussions are in the works with Township personnel regarding a potential rain date weekend, as a precautionary measure. This could be Columbus Day Weekend when the event has been held at times in the past. A decision will be advertised to the public once it is made.



## What are some benefits of the new location and format?

**Better Traffic Control** – Locating ALF at Jungle Habitat reduces any imposition on West Milford residential neighborhoods. In plain terms, no more street parking, no more blocked mailboxes, no more traffic congestion in lake communities, or restrictions on (very gracious) residents who have endured weekend disruptions on supporting their favorite local businesses on West Milford’s local commercial “main street” over the years. The main intersection of Town Center is rendered open for business under the new format and in the new location!

**No Lost Income for Businesses** – Over the past two years, there has been more feedback against closing access to businesses on Union Valley Road. With the restricted access for these businesses and dense traffic in the Town Center area during ALF, these stores have suffered in their bottom line. The new location allows businesses to procure a booth, if interested, or operate commerce as usual in their storefront or office.

## Showcasing Jungle Habitat

From 1972-1976, Warner Brothers © operated the “Jungle Habitat” theme park in West Milford, New Jersey. Millions of residents and our friends and neighbors from around the region spent time at this theme park attraction. The history of Jungle Habitat has been sustained for nearly fifty years as a part of the fabric of the West Milford community. To be honest, who doesn’t have a memory of Jungle Habitat, or know someone who does? The new ALF location and format will not only utilize the Jungle Habitat property but also pay homage to this cultural and historical landmark that helped many around the Northeast region know just how good of a time they could have in West Milford. The Township and Festival Producer are proud to partner with the “Jungle Habitat Society” to bring historical knowledge and awareness to current and future ALF attendees. In short, ALF 2024 will not only be a new tradition, but also bring “blasts from the past” to highlight all that West Milford has been, is now, and will become across generations.

\*NOTE: There will be a map rendering coming for all to see the layout.



## More Opportunities for Vendors

Street fair vendors will continue to be a key component of ALF. The new ALF format will provide an opportunity for a larger projected attendance over three days and longer hours of operation to allow vendors increased sales opportunities. Vendors will also have the option to participate for one day or all weekend to sell their product or service, or bring awareness to their civic group. While individual sales results vary, ALF will continue to provide a great opportunity for all businesses, crafters, and entrepreneurs to make it a successful experience.

*Vendor information will be posted on ALF’s website.*

## Improved Music Entertainment

**Improved Music Entertainment** - The new ALF format allows the event to showcase musical talent on multiple stages, with more time slots for bands to work an ALF performance into their schedules – a past challenge due to the seven-hour event time constraint. Attendees can enjoy fantastic locally, regionally, and even nationally acclaimed music acts, with daily contacts being made to expand our lineup. ALF and the Festival Producer are in discussions with notable artists from NBC’s The Voice, Country Music Association, and more.





## Addition of ALF Carnival

West Milford has not had a large-scale carnival in over 30 years -- until now! Past amusements at ALF have always been a challenge, with unreliable small-scale vendors, shotty and very expensive equipment, dirty rides and inflatables, a lack of space for amusements, and more. **Resident feedback year after year has called for more attractions for children (and adults), and these comments have not been ignored.** Safety and enjoyment are paramount for the Township and the festival producer. Despite difficulties created by industry trends making carnivals cost prohibitive for events like ALF, the festival producer was able to secure a reputable and experienced amusements vendor who is excited to bring a three-day carnival with over 20 rides to West Milford! ALF 2024 can now provide this attraction to enhance the festival experience for attendees of all ages. Attendees can purchase tickets to take advantage of this long overdue addition to ALF!



## HANDS IN 4 YOUTH

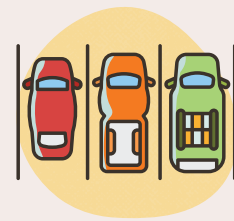
### “Camp For A Day” Childcare

In partnership with Hands In 4 Youth and Camp Vacamas, ALF will now be offering a fully chaperoned “Camp For a Day” childcare program. Parents and guardians will now be able to bring their children to the camp area, where they can be left to play and do age-appropriate activities under the supervision of trained camp counselors. This service is being provided for the benefit of those who want to enjoy the festival while still having their children occupied and safely monitored. *More information will be provided in the coming months as ALF approaches.*

**\*NOTE: Contrary to uninformed social media comments, ALF is NOT offering an overnight camping experience.**

## What are some logistical items being addressed at the new location?

**Parking** - Due to the NJ State Park Code, a per-car entry fee must be assessed for all vehicles entering the property regardless of whether they are attending one, two, or three days of the event or if they are general, premier, or handicapped status. A reduced re-entry fee will be made available as well for attendees who wish to make multiple trips to ALF. This per-car entry fee will assure compliance with state-mandated code and allow the event to NO LONGER require shuttles for patrons to attend this year's enhanced event. All parking will be on-site at Jungle Habitat to ensure attendees can safely and conveniently park to attend ALF. **More information will be available in the coming months and will be advertised on multiple platforms prior to ALF. PARKING PASSES CAN BE PURCHASED IN ADVANCE OR DAY-OF AT THE EVENT GATE!**



### Handicapped-Accessible Event

The festival grounds will offer accessibility features including handicapped parking and dedicated entrance, designated viewing areas, and handicapped portable restrooms. The Township and festival producer want all ALF attendees to enjoy the event safely and conveniently!

**Public Parking** - On-site parking will be available for ALL attendees. This will eliminate the need for shuttle buses and any disruptions to residential neighborhoods.

**Handicapped Parking (on-site)** - Designated on-site handicapped parking will be available for any attendees who qualify. Online options will be available in advance of the event to reserve a place.

**Premier Parking** - Upgraded premier parking will be available for purchase at a convenient proximity to the festival grounds. Fees collected help offset production and staffing costs incurred to hold the event.



## More Efficient & Safer Setup



Allowing the festival producer to set up event stages, signage, and other infrastructural components on the Jungle Habitat Property in the week leading up to the event will be beneficial in numerous ways. With more attention to detail being allowed due to increased time, materials constructed will be safer and sturdier than ever. Items like generators, trash and recycling receptacles, decorations, light displays, and more can be set up over an entire week versus a few hours in the morning. This will reduce oversights and improve the overall quality and enjoyment of ALF for all parties involved.

### Sustainability & Carbon Footprint for ALF

The festival organizer is committed to ensuring environmental sustainability in every aspect of the event. Comprehensive waste management solutions will be implemented for proper garbage and recycling handling. Food vendors will have access to free oil disposal services to minimize waste. Energy-efficient lighting, including low-voltage bulbs and battery and solar-powered displays, will be utilized throughout the festival grounds. Additionally, bio-diesel generators will be employed whenever possible to further reduce carbon emissions. Furthermore, the festival will invest in carbon offset projects to mitigate its environmental footprint and contribute to a more sustainable future.



### Ornamental & Evening Lighting Displays

ALF 2024 will introduce numerous ornamental lighting and captivating evening displays, adding depth and charm to this community event. These displays will provide an inviting aesthetic and illuminate the festival grounds as the day turns to night. Attendees will be amazed with the displays that will “light up” the festival!



### Bike, Car & Truck Shows

ALF will feature a Bike Night on Friday, as well as a Car Show on Saturday and Truck Show on Sunday. Attendees can view a variety of vehicles from different eras and specialties, meeting with the owners and learning about the history of their bikes, cars, and trucks. This is always a wonderful part of ALF that continues to grow!

