

Chalk mine's future uncertain

Area residents hope to keep landmark open

By Gretchen Fowler
gfowler@theindependent.com

SCOTIA — The annual Haunted Hollow, at the Happy Jack Chalk Mine near Scotia, can be a scary thing.

So can the task of trying to keep such a landmark open.

"I don't see us closing unless something catastrophic happens, but it's tight," chalk mine manager Jeanie Vogler said. "As a whole board, we really have to look at where our money's going and at finding grant-writers."

The Haunted Hollow serves as one of two annual fund-raising events for the chalk mine, which is open to tourists each summer. But after expenses and splitting the proceeds with Haunted Hollow Spooks, there's not as much left as one might think.

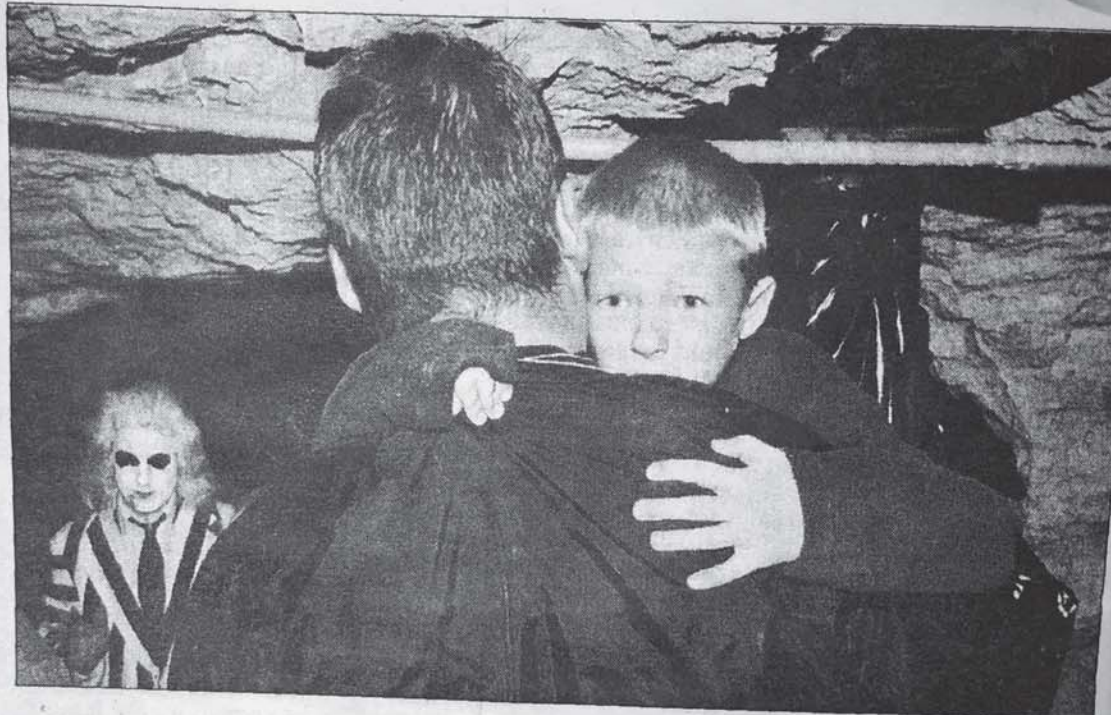
"It's gonna help," Vogler said of the \$10,000 the Haunted Hollow brought in this year.

Still, about \$4,000 of that total will go to cover expenses, and \$3,000 of the remaining \$6,000 goes to the Haunted Hollow Spooks.

The spooks use their portion of the money for scholarships, after-prom parties and other community projects in the Scotia and North Loup area. The money the mine gets to keep goes toward upkeep, improvements and paying off debt.

Revenue was hard to come by this year when a portion of Highway 11, along which the chalk mine is located, was closed. The mine's tourist season begins Memorial Day each year and lasts through Oct. 10, but because of the road construction, Vogler said traffic didn't pick up this summer until the first of August.

She said access to the mine



Tanner Kolar, 8, holds on to Chris Elstermeier as they make their way through the Haunted Hollow at the Happy Jack Chalk Mine on Oct. 21, 2001. Independent/Gerik Parmele

For more info

Donations to the Happy Jack Chalk Mine can be sent to: RR 1, Box 1191, Scotia, NE 68875.

For more information on the Happy Jack Chalk Mine, call (308) 245-3276.

could only be gained from the north, from about the last week in May until around July 17. Then when the highway was reopened, Vogler said, people still weren't sure if they could get there.

Fortunately for the chalk mine, the annual Haunted Hollow and Putting of the Peak fund-raisers continue to be a source for added income. Volunteers work to set up and put on the Haunted Hollow each fall, and without such dedication, Vogler said, the mine couldn't

survive.

"It kind of blows you away the amount of time people actually donate to come out here to the mine," Vogler said. "I think the community sees the importance of having this around here."

Daryl Jorgensen of North Loup volunteers to help with the Haunted Hollow every year. He grew up in the area and has memories of the mine from when he was a kid. He said he believes the attraction helps the community and gives people in the area a sense of pride.

"When you get in there, it's just hard to believe at one time it was under water," Jorgensen said of the mine.

Janinel Jacobs of North Loup also volunteers for the Haunted Hollow each year and appreciates having a historical attraction nearby.

"As far as tourism, we don't have a lot to attract, so the chalk

mine really is something that we like to get out there and have people come view," Jacobs said.

She said she recently took visitors from Florida through the mine, and they thought it was "a big deal."

Vogler said plans for the future, if the funding becomes available, include printing new brochures and providing additional historical information about the mine, improving the interior of the mine, and hiring a grant-writer to help secure funds.

"We've got a lot of hopes and dreams ...," Vogler said. "It's just getting them all to come through."

She said, "I know it (the mine) is near and dear to most people's hearts, and usually all it takes is a phone call for help. Our community supports us very strongly. We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them."