

Evacuees celebrate 'Trunk or Treat'

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Costumes were not required for the Halloween festivities at the FEMA trailer park near Baker on Tuesday evening.

Sure, there were the requisite fairies, witches and goblins — even a ninja was spotted a time or two.

But most children gathered on the basketball courts toward the back of the complex dressed only as themselves. They came carrying brown paper bags and went around the vehicles parked in a semicircle around the basketball court, playing games and stuffing fistfuls of candy into their recently decorated bags.

Charlotte McGee asked her 5-year-old granddaughter Tiphonie Jordan to stay close as Jordan surveyed the entertainment.

Jordan had been there all afternoon, visiting each of the cars volunteers from LSU had backed up to the court. From their trunks, the LSU students and other volunteers offered entertainment including pin the nose on the pumpkin, picture frame decorating and Halloween face painting for displaced evacuees of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

McGee watched her granddaughter and said she was glad Jordan got to enjoy Halloween.

For Halloween 2005, there was no organized activity at the Federal Emergency Management Agency Renaissance Village and McGee, who was just settling in, could not take her granddaughter out for trick or treating.

This year, it came to them.

"It's fun for the kids," McGee said. "This is really good to see them having so much fun. They're really enjoying themselves."

Trunk or Treat, as the evening was called, was a collaboration between LSU's Delta Express and AmeriCorps' City Year programs, said Mary LeBlanc, director of education services for the YK Hurricane Collaborative.

The groups, which usually work together on after-school programs to assist children living at Renaissance Village, decided to put together something extra for Halloween. Instead of tutoring, the children got treats.

Juli Anna Avila, a doctoral candidate from the University of California at Berkeley and project manager for Delta Express, said most of the student volunteers were enrolled in an LSU course called Working with Children in Crisis.

The day-to-day requirements of the course include tutoring and technology courses for kindergarten students to high school seniors who live at Renaissance Village, but the students decided to put together “Trunk or Treat” as an extracurricular activity.

Jolanta Smolen, a Ph.D. student in education, and Emily Johnson, an LSU senior majoring in elementary education, organized volunteers, planned activities and helped solicit donations.

Because of the organization’s focus on education, trick-or-treaters got school supplies to go along with their candy.

Even some of the games had an educational twist.

Chris Ballay, an LSU sophomore in journalism, ran a Monster Mad Libs game out of the trunk of his car. The word game, which uses word substitutions for comedic effect, was Halloween based.

“Growing up, I kind of took Halloween for granted,” Ballay said. “We thought this would be something good for the kids, to show them Halloween can be fun.”

When some trick-or-treaters did not want to play his game, Ballay asked them to tell him what they wanted to be for Halloween.

He got answers that included the usual suspects. But a few of children said they just wanted to be themselves.

It was proof, Ballay thinks, that you do not have to dress up to have fun on Halloween.