

# Green Halloween spreading across the Eastside

By Heather Rae Darval  
Staff Writer

When Corey Colwell-Lipson thinks of Halloween, it isn't the ghosts, ghouls, graveyards or Great Pumpkin that gives her a fright.

What's truly frightening to the Sammamish mom are all those treats loaded with high-fructose corn syrup and other chemicals; the candy made abroad using child labor, toxins in cheap plastic masks, childhood obesity rates, and all those non-biodegradable that have come to embody the holiday.

As a parent concerned with children's health, the environment, and fair trade, the excesses of Halloween are enough to make Colwell-Lipson's head spin. And all that spinning got her thinking that it doesn't have to be this way.

What if children were given polished rocks, colorful feathers, shiny beads, soap bubbles, and temporary tattoos instead of fistfuls of chemical-ridden candies? What if parents were given easy, affordable, sustainable options for costumes? How about some all-natural candies? What if it were easy to find homes that weren't all about candy?

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Within months Green Halloween has gone from a good idea to a movement. It is backed by Overlake Hospital, all four Seattle-area Whole Foods, and local non-profit Treeswing, which Colwell-Lipson chose as the beneficiary for all

parties, ideas for non-food treasures to hand out on Oct. 31 and where to find them, tips for hosting costume-recycling parties, or how to curb the tendency to over-indulge.

Colwell-Lipson calls it "thinking outside the candy box," and it's something her family has been practicing for many years, whether by encouraging her children to trade-in candy for gifts from the "Halloween Fairy," getting them excited about helping the planet or raising money for children in need around the world.

When looking into costumes, traditions, and treasures for Halloween, she said, people should question whether this is healthy for children. Is it environmentally friendly? Is it people-friendly or made and traded fairly? Does it give back to the community? As long as it meets one of these criteria, it is a better choice. If an item, like Play-doh, is healthy for children, but doesn't meet the other criteria, that's great. Maybe a square of stickers is printed on recycled paper and is good for the planet's and children's health.

Green Halloween fundraisers. It's hard for Colwell-Lipson to believe how far her idea has grown. "I think the timing is right. I've had several people say to me Green Halloween is the perfect storm because it hits on all these hot issues, be it lead in our food and our toys, fair-trade issues, global warming, (or) childhood obesity. Everyone is starting to realize that we've not created sustainability here and we are going to be in trouble. We can do something now or later, but we have to do something and I want to do it now," Colwell-Lipson, 35, said.

Recently, she read studies stating that her children's generation is the first in many years with a lower life expectancy than that of their parents. She also learned about a high diabetes rate among children. "One of every three children born today will develop diabetes and here we are dishing out handfuls of candy. What we're trying to do is create sustainable holiday traditions that are good for our children, good for the planet, and good for the long term, because we can't continue giving our children these things forever. We just can't," Colwell-Lipson said.

These problems don't begin or end with Halloween, but

Colwell-Lipson thinks that holidays and traditions are a great place to get change started. And when it comes to unhealthy excesses, Halloween tops her list.

All this frustration over the years made Colwell-Lipson ecstatic last year when her daughters were handed stickers and soap bubbles at two of the houses they visited. She was so excited she shouted in the street and was so inspired she thought up Green Halloween in the following weeks.

She's not alone in these feelings. "We certainly believe that the biggest or most effective way to bring about better health for our children is by making changes at a core level of our culture like holidays and how we celebrate them. Is it all about candy or can it be about children having fun and being healthy? If we can make these changes at the core level of our behaviors, than it will be easier to make broad changes," said Tracy Bennett, executive director of Treeswing.

"It's very empowering for parents and children to know that they have choices. They don't have to do things they way they've always been done. They can say, 'Look, I'm going to take care of myself and of the planet and I'll still have



Mark Lowry/Reporter  
Corey Colwell-Lipson and mother Lynn Colwell show off ideas for Green Halloween treasures to hand out on Oct. 31.

fun."

Green Halloween, which recently got its trademark for free, is all about providing

families with alternatives, including how to throw healthy and eco-friendly Halloween

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## Issaquah/Sammamish Reporter October 26, 2007

This isn't about boycotting Halloween, it's about taking some old traditions and making them sustainable. "We want our kids to enjoy this holiday, but at the same time, Halloween is so excessively unhealthy. It's a challenge for me. On every level that I am passionate about, it just gets under my skin," Colwell-Lipson said.

"When I started thinking about Green Halloween and offering families alternatives, it excited me on a lot of different levels: the mom in me, the health nut in me, and the environmentalist in me."

But she realizes that not everyone will feel the same about all this. She knows some people think Halloween should be left as it is. When preparing for a Green Halloween event at the Whole Foods in Bellevue, Colwell-Lipson tried to prepare herself for a fight. It never came. Almost everyone she's talked to have been positive about Green Halloween. Children, especially, are thrilled when they see the polished rocks and gemstones, the bright feathers, the stickers, the bubbles, the charms, the organic candy. "If you just tell parents, no candy, well then they think, 'What am I going to hand out?' If you give them some ideas, which is what I've tried to do, then they are inspired."

For anyone interested, there is lots of help. The Green Halloween website offers lots of tips and advice for anyone interested. Whole Foods has put Green Halloween banners around the store marking healthy, green options for shoppers and will host green parties on Oct. 31. Overlake Hospital printed out thousands of Green Halloween information cards. Issaquah Highlands printed out "Proud to be a Green Halloween Home" signs for residents.

Colwell-Lipson admits her ideas aren't new. People have handed out toothbrushes, pencils and packages of Play-doh for years. Even as Green Halloween received more and more buzz, but it's never been easy for people looking for alternatives to find ideas. It takes a lot of time and work and Colwell-Lipson knows it is hard for families to spend the time finding affordable, realistic options. Often, too, those houses offering green, healthy alternatives are the only ones on the block.

More information, tips, and events for Green Halloween can be found at <http://www.greenhalloween.org>.

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