

Public Safety Program Excellence Award in Memory of William H. Hansell, Sr., and Alice Hansell

POPULATIONS OF 50,000 AND UNDER



GERALD S. KEMPEN

ICMA's Public Safety Program Excellence Award, established in memory of Philadelphia firefighter William H. Hansell, Sr., and his wife Alice, is awarded to a local government and its chief administrator for the most creative public safety program. This year, ICMA presents the award in the 50,000-and-under population category to Orono, Maine, and Town Manager Gerald S. Kempen for the Green Halloween House of Safety.

Nationally, the number of fatal accidents and injuries to children increases on Halloween. What once was a night where children dressed in costume to surprise their neighbors, has grown into a national night where millions of children with masks covering their faces, hurry from house to house, often forgetting what they have learned about crossing streets or talking to strangers. Halloween has become a parent's nightmare.

In an effort to reduce the number of accident victims, communities have encouraged children to go trick or treating earlier in the evening when it is still light or focus on teaching them safety measures. While this has worked in some communities, the town of Orono, Maine, wanted to take a different approach: it decided to bring the children to a central location where they could enjoy Halloween in a safe environment. The Orono Halloween House of Safety was born.

On Halloween, the town reserves the high school auditorium, and 16 different town agencies and community nonprofit organizations construct booths in the gymnasium. Children participating in the Halloween festivities are given a card with 16 squares and told to visit each of the booths. At each booth the children are asked two safety-related questions. Children who answer correctly receive a treat; those who don't are helped by the person staffing the booth in working out the answer. Each booth is unique, all the questions are different, and treats and candies are plentiful.

The person staffing the booth also stamps the child's card. When the card has all 16 stamps, the child puts his or her name on it and enters into a drawing. As children who have completed the tour

of booths wait for the drawing to take place, they can play games, ride on several amusement rides, or watch the clowns and other entertainers.

The Halloween House of Safety has been in operation for 10 years. At first, it attracted just a couple of hundred parents and children. Today, it has grown to an event that attracts over 1,300 people from Orono and surrounding communities. The program costs little to implement, with most of the work done by volunteers, and the prizes for the drawing and amusement rides are donated by local businesses.

In the Halloween House of Safety, the town of Orono has found a way for children to celebrate Halloween in a fun, safe way. Hundreds of children are kept off the streets, and there have been no Halloween-related accidents since the inception of the program. Moreover, participating children learn valuable safety tips that carry on beyond Halloween night.

The exact number of children who have been kept safe through the program's efforts will probably never be known. But the fact that there have been no Halloween-related injuries or deaths since the program began makes the time spent by the dozens of volunteers who make the program work worthwhile. ♣

Kids and adults in Orono, Maine, enjoy a safe Halloween at the High School Gym.

