

TIME FOR TRADITIONS

Six Bergenites explain the fall rituals their families cherish.

Compiled by **Sophia Doyle** and **Meredith Tamirian**

It was just a year ago that farms offered pumpkin picking in timed sessions and families were planning Thanksgiving dinners via Zoom. Ah, those were the days—days many of us would like to forget! This fall, many Bergen County residents will resume the seasonal traditions that help define their families, whether it's a simple drive out to a Sussex County farm or an ambitious Halloween display. Here, six readers tell us about the autumnal rituals they share with their families, friends—and sometimes complete strangers. Perhaps they'll inspire you to start your own.



A GAME LIKE NO OTHER

The pros aren't the only footballers to suit up on Thanksgiving. For many locals, pigskin and Turkey Day go hand in hand, as weekend warriors reunite for backyard football games. But these aren't your run-of-the-mill pickup games: These contests require organization, and some folks take them to new heights with uniforms, banners, trophies—and a year of gloating for the winners.

"I play in an annual Thanksgiving Turkey Bowl with my brother and his friends. I only started playing with them because they needed even teams, but the game has quickly become my favorite fall tradition. Now we play six-on-six with substitutes, so there are quite a few of us involved. It is increasingly difficult to find time for all of us to get together because we're leaving for colleges across the country, but with a year's worth of bragging rights on the line we each manage to find our way to the local high school football field on the morning of the fourth Thursday of every November."

—Matt Farrington, 21,
Allendale



IT'S DOWNRIGHT SPOOKY

The fall holiday that gives free rein to one's wildest, wickedest creative notions? That would be Halloween, of course, and when the family (and sometimes a spirited neighbor or two) pitches in to create designs and decorate, the result can be a longstanding tradition that spreads some holiday cheer—and spooky chills.

"Our Halloween house started like most traditions: small. It has since grown and become a family affair. I really enjoy putting the Halloween scenes together because I create most of them with what I have around the house, and decorating brings so much excitement to my three kids, Finn, Declan and Delany. Last year, a neighbor's son even volunteered and helped us decorate. The community is amazing and really enjoys the show. Before the season begins, our neighbors always knock on our door and ask when we'll start decorating and what's new this year—they're always itching to see what we have planned. Our newest addition to the decorations was a 'haunted korn maize,' which took two full days to construct. I had to drive all the way to Sparta for the corn, but it was worth it. The best part for me, though, is when I get to be part of a scene and jump out to scare people on Halloween, just like in a horror movie!"

—Michael Kristan, 49,
River Edge



WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS

Many traditions and regular activities came to a screeching halt because of last year's shutdown—no annual picnics or family trips, no reunions or holiday parties. So what to do when one yearly ritual ends? Start a new one, of course.

"The pandemic was squashing all of our traditions, so we started a new one last fall. After months of quarantine, my husband Mikki and I took our two sons, Dean and Pierces, for a weekend of camping at the Delaware Water Gap and enjoyed the fresh air and foliage. We also added a campfire and turkey fry to our new tradition. While we missed some of our past traditions, we were happy to be together to start a new one that we plan to keep."

—Natalie Rehak, 45,
Park Ridge



EYES ON THE PIES

Fall starts the season of foliage walks and pumpkin spice drinks, but it also triggers the giving spirit. So why not combine autumn fun with selfless acts? One Ramsey group, for instance, uses their love for baking to do something sweet for others.

"For the last 10 years, I have organized a group that makes apple and berry pies to support outreach projects at Saint John's Episcopal Church in Ramsey. Using apples donated to us by Blooming Hill Farm in Monroe, N.Y., the crew makes 25 apple pies and 25 berry pies for people to purchase for Thanksgiving, allowing us to raise around \$675. My motto is 'We make; you bake.' We freeze the pies immediately after we make them, so people buy them frozen and bake them whenever they want a homemade pie without the work of making one themselves."

—Elaine Jones, 63, Ramsey



AVOIDING THE CROWDS

We say "this place is a zoo!" when it's crazy busy somewhere, but when it comes to visiting an actual zoo, we prefer not to be jostled by crowds. That rarely happens at this time of year at a nearby zoo, one of the reasons why a River Vale clan takes an annual trip out to Sussex County. The zoo to yourself? That's sure to please!

"My family really enjoys taking day trips in the fall to Space Farm Zoo in Sussex. The excitement starts when we see how the leaves are changing colors during the ride over there. When we arrive, everyone really has a chance to enjoy the zoo because it's rarely crowded in fall. That always gives my kids—Bailey, Quinn and Evan—a chance to get close to the animals. Our other family fall trip is to Heaven Hill Farm in Vernon for its fall festivities. The kids always have a blast, and I enjoy seeing my family happy and together."

—Leigh Martin, 38,
River Vale



COMFORTING ROUTINES

A home-cooked meal. A pair of broken-in jeans. A baby blanket. An assortment of things can give us security, and sometimes it's the time of year that warms the heart. Fall gives us the opportunity to do many special things that bring us seasonal comfort, from picking fresh orchard fruit to toasting with friends on a crisp afternoon.

"Fall is my favorite season because of the traditions we follow—they allow for more family time. I refer to it as getting back to the 'basics,' our routines. The weather is perfect to visit farms and wineries: Our go-to is the Warwick Valley Winery, but we've also been bringing our daughter Kinsley to Apple Ridge Orchard in Warwick. She always has fun apple picking, finding a pumpkin that is almost bigger than she is and feeding the animals. We have enjoyed introducing Kinsley to the 'basics' and can't wait to do the same with our new daughter Ryleigh."

—Jillian O'Shaughnessy, 35,
Mahwah

