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## Exeter fright expert employs terrifying tactics at local haunt

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Thursday, Oct. 21, 2010

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A new location deep in the woods may make Haunted Overload, a local nationally recognized haunted attraction with a formidable fright factor, enough to scare its creator.

Eric Lowther, 44, Exeter, has been creating macabre characters and Halloween haunts for years, most recently turning the fields at Copple House Farm in Lee into a frightful walk for thousands of thrill and chill seekers. But this year, he says, a new location just down the street appears to bring a creep factor of its own.



"This place is so much scarier being set deep in the woods. It just seems to have a fright factor of a much higher level," Lowther says, admitting to some nervous moments during the months of set-up after dark at the new location at DeMerritt Hill Farm. "It has been a scary place to be working at night. I have to admit, I am creeped out working there after dark ... 'Course I am surrounded by all the creepy stuff we have made, too, but there is something about these woods that is naturally scary." And Lowther knows scary. He says he used to trick-or-treat like most children, but unlike most, hung skeletons above his bed so they would scare him when he woke up. An artist at heart, he began carving, sculpting and building haunted yards at his parent's home at the age of 12.

As he grew, so did his props and elaborate creations.

The seed for Haunted Overload began in the late 1990s in the front yard of Lowther's Exeter home, which he shares with his wife. The towering creations and elaborate scares brought thousands of visitors to his small Garfield Street neighborhood.

Lowther says he took the leap to create a large-scale haunted walk on a farm in Lee because it became apparent it was time to expand and let his neighbors rest in peace.

"I remember when a bus pulled up in front of my house one of the nights and I was blown away that word of mouth had brought so many to see it," he said. "But the traffic it brought was a bit much for my neighborhood."

And even with the move to Lee, word of mouth has brought the masses. Last year 5,000 people attended the walk, which was offered for just a handful of nights during the last two weeks of October. Lowther says this year, with an expanded schedule of six full-blown "Fright Nights" and two "Fright Night Lites," at which outdoor lighting is left on and "nobody chases you with a chain saw," Haunted Overload has a goal of 1,000 visitors per night.



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And Lowther says they will be ready.

"We learned we needed to relocate from Cople House in March. I lucked out and found this location right down the street, but we had two years of work — buildings and structures — that had to be moved and tons of new construction to make this happen," he says.

The new setting, at a 120-acre apple orchard, has been Lowther's second home since March as he worked on sets at nights and on his days off from his regular job.

"I thought about just not doing it for a year, but there was so much riding on it," he says. "I did not want to lose our momentum.

Word of mouth has brought us a lot of souls to scare, and we want to keep this success growing."

Part of the popularity of the haunt has been attributed to the realistic creations and artistry that has gone into the spooky attractions created by Lowther.

Now a longer, more intense haunted walk at the DeMerritt Hill Farm, located on Route 155, Haunted Overload has twice made the list of Top 13 haunted attractions in the country and the cover of Haunt World magazine.

Lowther attended the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art in Dover, N.J. After school he began his career as a "retouch graphic artist" in advertising — his day job — but monsters and demons are his true passion.

"When I am not working, I am creating this," Lowther said.

"Every day off this entire summer was spent at this farm working on these creations. All the hard work pays off when you hear the feedback, get the national recognition ... and, of course, there are the screams."

Haunted Overload "Daytime Haunts for Kids" will be offered between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. Oct. 22-24 and 29-31 (\$5).

Haunted Overload "Fright Night Lite " (all the lights, sounds and effects without the scares) will be offered Oct. 21 and Oct. 28 between 7 and 9 p.m. (\$12.50).

The Haunted Overload "Main Event" is scheduled for Oct. 22-24 and 29-31, with varied hours (\$18.50).

For more information or to purchase tickets visit [www.hauntedoverload.com](http://www.hauntedoverload.com).

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*This story originally appeared in the NH Weekend section of the New Hampshire Union Leader. For the best of what is happening in the Granite State check the Union Leader every Thursday, at your local newsstand, delivered to your home, or through the complete eEdition. Find more information at [unionleader.com](http://unionleader.com).*



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