



## MARILYN KENISON

### Founder – Milford Pumpkin Festival

In September of 1988, after a year of study, a special Milford town meeting was called to determine whether the town would abandon its old town hall in favor of building a new facility, or if the town would approve of and fund the renovation of its historic 1865 town hall.

As chairman of the committee that worked with architect David Cheever in developing a comprehensive plan for the renovation of the historic building, I made the presentation at the town meeting on behalf of the renovation. Bill Petraske presented plans for a new town hall. At the end of the meeting a vote was taken and the 700 people present overwhelmingly chose to renovate the old building.

The project was divided into two phases: the 1.26 million dollar renovation of the main building which would house all the town offices, to be paid through a municipal bond, and the restoration of the second floor auditorium to be completed with funds raised from private sources in the amount of \$260,000. A committee for the auditorium project, known as THARC (Town Hall Auditorium Restoration Committee) was chaired by Patty Rotch.

Raising the money to restore the auditorium to its former grandeur was a huge undertaking. THARC held various fundraisers and approached local businesses for the money. One night as I lay awake, unable to sleep due to a dinner time cup of coffee, I was thinking about ways THARC could raise a large amount of money with just one event. The concept of a pumpkin festival came out of that night of insomnia.

At the next THARC meeting I presented my idea and a rough outline of how a pumpkin festival might work. The committee was immediately excited by the idea and one person in particular, Bob Kokko, was especially enthusiastic. Before the end of that meeting, I think Bob was fantasizing about planting a huge pumpkin patch.

After months of planning, the first Milford Great Pumpkin Festival was launched in October of 1990. The weekend arrived with the tail end of a hurricane that had moved up the coast, but in spite of drenching rain many more people than we had ever anticipated poured into the oval to attend the music events, shop at the various booths and buy pumpkins from Bob Kokko's huge display.

At the end of the first day, THARC treasurer Judith Zeiser reported a profit that amazed and delighted our small, hard working committee. Plans began right then for the second annual Great Pumpkin Festival.

Over the next eight years I stayed with the Festival. The auditorium was restored and other organizations (the Souhegan Nursing Association and then DO-IT) joined in to co-sponsor the event. In 1998 I retired as a Milford Selectman and from the Pumpkin Festival. The Pumpkin Festival has grown and changed but twenty-eight years later draws thousands of people to downtown Milford every October. It still amazes me that one cup of coffee could have such far reaching effects.