

# OBITUARIES

## ‘Mickey Mouse Club’ star Corcoran dies

BY DAVID COLKER  
LOS ANGELES TIMES

LOS ANGELES — Disney child actor Kevin Corcoran, who played the irrepressible Moochie in the “Spin and Marty” serials on “The Mickey Mouse Club” and went on to play roles in films such as “Old Yeller,” died Tuesday at Providence Saint Joseph Medical Center in Burbank. He was 66.

The cause was colorectal cancer, said his wife, Laura.

Moochie — an adorable, talkative kid who was always getting into jams — was not far removed from the real-life Corcoran, said David Stollery, who played Marty. Corcoran was 7 when he started appearing in the series that took place on a dude ranch.

“He was just this little rambunctious bundle of energy,” Stollery said in an interview Wednesday. “He

was Moochie, a perfect fit for the character.”

The character was so popular that Corcoran as Moochie was featured in other Disney productions, including the film “The Shaggy Dog.”

Other Disney child stars of the era got more notice and bigger parts. But viewers took the pint-sized Corcoran to heart.

“To kids of my generation, Moochie was an irresistible figure, a kid we could all relate to,” film critic Leonard Maltin said in taped comments released by Disney. “Because he was so genuine, not a goody-goody type of a model child.

“He had a touch of mischief and curiosity, and you couldn’t help but like him.”

Stollery said that even at a young age, Corcoran was a professional who knew his lines and took direc-

But Corcoran admitted that he didn’t always have to fake being mischievous. “Tommy Kirk and I had a great relationship,” Corcoran said in a 2000 Los Angeles Times interview. He played Kirk’s younger brother in several productions, and the two often played practical jokes on each other.

“I remember one sequence,” Corcoran said, “in which I was supposed to be throwing rocks at him. Tommy and I had been battling off-screen about something, so instead of the prop rubber rocks, I started throwing real ones.”

Among the other Disney films in which he appeared were “Toby Tyler, or Ten Weeks with a Circus,” “Pollyanna” (opposite Hayley Mills) and “Swiss Family Robinson.”

He was also in several non-Disney productions, in-

cluding guest spots on TV series such as “Wagon Train,” “The Littlest Hobo” and “My Three Sons” with one of his favorite actors, Fred MacMurray.

In his late teens, he made a sudden decision to quit acting after auditioning for a role that was only vaguely defined.

“I said, ‘Well, what is this character about?’” he said in a 2012 San Francisco Chronicle interview. “And they fumbled around because they didn’t know. Then it hit me. You know what? I know more about making movies than the guy making this picture. I’m done acting.”

Corcoran went on to a career behind the camera. And unlike many child actors, he had a quiet life with a long marriage and no public drama.

“I enjoy entertaining people and doing good

work,” he told the Chronicle. “I’m glad my life didn’t have to be a spectacle.”

He was born into a show business family on June 10, 1949, in Santa Monica, Calif. “While my father was working at MGM, he heard that children were needed to play some extra roles,” he said in an interview with Walt Disney Productions for a company biography.

“By the time I arrived — No. 5 of eight children — the Corcoran kids had been established in the industry.”

One of his earliest appearances was in the film “The Glenn Miller Story,” released in 1954. His first Disney appearance was the short “Adventures in Dairyland,” and it led to him being cast in “Spin and Marty.”

After quitting acting, Corcoran got a theater arts

degree at California State University, Northridge. His career was mostly in television, where he worked as a producer on several shows, including “Murder, She Wrote,” “The Shield” and “Sons of Anarchy.” He also directed two episodes of “Murder, She Wrote.”

In 2006, he was named a Disney Legend by the studio where he saw his most success as an actor and where he did occasional work, including producing episodes of the “Herbie, the Love Bug” series in 1982.

“I’ll always be ‘Mooch’ to the guys around here,” he said in the studio interview. “Heck, they’ve practically raised me.”

In addition to his wife, Corcoran is survived by his sisters Che Keene, Norreen Corcoran and Kerry del Villar, and a brother, Hugh Corcoran.

## Haunted hayrides toe line between safe, scary

BY KATHRYN SKELTON  
AND LINDSAY TICE  
SUN JOURNAL

Last fall, Peter Ricker debuted Nightmare on the Ridge at Wallingford’s Fruit House in Auburn, a haunted hayride frightfest with chain saws, cackling women and ample ooze and splatter.

Ricker has ditched Nightmare’s tractors and wagons.

This season — the first after a Maine teenager was killed in a hayride crash in a nearby town — Ricker’s customers will walk rather than ride.

Ricker wasn’t concerned about his own event’s safety, he said. He wanted to remove any question and get the fun, good kind of scary back.

“Our insurance people told us they had no problems,” Ricker said. “We had nobody who was encouraging us not to. We just felt that the rides in the state maybe ought to take a year or so off just so people can have a time to enjoy Halloween and not think about some of the tragedies of it.”

Last October, 17-year-old Cassidy Charette died and 22 others were injured when a wagon overturned at The Gauntlet haunted hayride at Harvest Hill Farm in Mechanic Falls.

Her death suddenly got people talking about seasonal ride safety.

Hayrides face little regulation across the country and aren’t inspected or licensed at all in Maine. An international group is drawing up safety standards, spurred by deaths in Maine and Idaho last year, to offer to states.

This summer, the Maine Legislature created a task force to recommend what, if any, rules should be in place for hayrides and who ought to enforce them, but that task force hasn’t met yet.

“It’s going to open up an interesting conversation,” said Keith Harris of Dayton, whose Pumpkin Valley Farm offers wagon rides to his pick-your-own-pumpkin patch. A member of the Maine Farm Bureau’s board of directors, he expects to sit on that Maine task force.

Some hayrides are pulled by horses, and some are pulled by tractors or other vehicles. Some operate in the day, others at night. Some charge, some don’t. Add in hayrides at fairs and parades and you’ve got a lot of variables, Harris said.

“I think most of them are extremely safe,” he said. “It’s been going on for how long and last year’s accident was the first (in Maine). It’s just unfortunate that it’s what brought it to light.”

With Charette’s death, Maine’s been pulled into a national conversation. Across the country, more than a dozen deaths and a number of injuries have occurred on hayrides over the past 20 years.

Last year, a teenage worker in Idaho was killed when he was run over by the bus traveling through a hayride-like zombie attraction. Last weekend, a 13-year-old was seriously injured when he was run over on a haunted

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LEONARD PICKEL, INDUSTRY EXPERT, OWNER OF HAUNTREPRENEURS

hayride in North Dakota.

“Hayrides notoriously are much more dangerous than walk-through attractions,” said Leonard Pickel, an industry expert and owner of Hauntrepreneurs, a themed attraction design and consulting firm in Orlando. “Almost every year, there’s some kind of a serious injury, if not a death.”

As the new season starts in Maine, operators here say they’re taking stock and being vigilant.

‘If people had paid attention ...’

National experts say there are hundreds of hayrides in the U.S., many of them scattered throughout the Northeast, where they are particularly popular. One expert estimated that 90 percent of America’s professional hayrides are within 200 miles of central Maine.

“Most of the hayrides are in your neck of the woods,” said Larry Kirchner of the Haunted House Association.

Maine’s Fire Marshal has estimated Maine might have as many as 100. However, no one has had to keep track.

What is known: Agritourism — which includes corn mazes, farm stands and hayrides, among other agricultural attractions — is growing in Maine. Between 2007 and 2012, the number of farms doing some form of agritourism jumped 141 percent, from 112 to 270, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Census.

That census is done every five years. The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry believes agritourism has grown even more popular since 2012.

“It’s likely we have more than 270 farms that are doing it now,” said John Bott, spokesman for the department. “It’s an increasing trend as they try to diversify their services on the farm to enhance the bottom line and bring more people to the farm.”

Nationally, experts say the number of hayride attractions has also been growing — which creates greater risk.

“Because of the economy, there are so many people, farmers especially, who are jumping into the haunted house industry with very little knowledge of what is safe and what isn’t safe,” Pickel said.

He recalled, for example, a spate of accidents caused by a type of wagon notorious for flipping over. It took several years for operators to stop using them.

“Because there are so many people getting into the industry who don’t know those things, don’t understand what is dangerous and what is not, it’s always a never-ending battle to make sure those people, the new guys who pop up, are introduced

to safety regulations,” Pickel said.

As a whole, hayrides are generally safe. Of the tens of thousands of people who participate each year, serious injuries are few and deaths even fewer. But experts say hayrides — unlike haunted houses — have little to no oversight and that makes individual hayrides potentially dangerous.

“If people had paid attention to common sense, (some past incidents) wouldn’t have happened,” said Randy Bates, a self-described “hayride safety guru” who’s owned a Pennsylvania haunted house and hayride attraction for 25 years and has trained hayride safety inspectors in that state for years.

Many people, including Maine law enforcement, put Harvest Hill Farm in that “could have been prevented” category.

Criminal charges have been filed against the farm, a mechanic and the hayride’s driver. No trial date has been set, according to a clerk at Androscoggin County Superior Court.

Jodi Nofsinger, a lawyer representing Cassidy Charette’s family, has filed notice of claim against Harvest Hill Farm, indicating a coming civil suit. She said this week that a civil suit hasn’t yet been filed.

Although Harvest Hill Farm is not running The Gauntlet this year, it is offering two other hayride attractions, according to its website. One is a horse-drawn wagon. The other is a “haunted day ride” described as “wagon rides through The Spooky Forest.”

Introducing standards

In designing his new Halloween attraction in Hebron, Harold Brooks said he put safety front and center.

“I think it’s on people’s minds,” said Brooks, founder of the Redneck Blank. “I think it should be on people’s minds.”

The Zombie Invasion Farm Ride will use six retired Army transport trucks with open backs — “they were made to haul people where a hay wagon is made to haul hay” — traveling on a relatively flat 1.2-mile course with speeds capped at 8 mph.

Branches have been trimmed to make sure no one gets hit in the face. No customers will be touched or pulled off the ride. The 35 to 40 actors won’t be allowed to approach the trucks until the vehicles have stopped and won’t give chase as they pull away.

A tunnel filled with zombie clowns won’t really be an enclosed tunnel. It will have two walls and no roof because Brooks didn’t want to worry about riders being trapped with carbon monoxide from exhaust.

Even with those precautions, Brooks’ insurance

agent got 10 no’s before getting a yes when she quoted out coverage.

“I almost didn’t do it because I wasn’t able to get a policy,” Brooks said. “I think the accident last year had to do with that, too.”

Operators are also re-evaluating long-running rides.

Chrissy Kenerson, co-owner of Treworgy Family Orchards in Levant, has been running a hayride for 20 years, accommodating thousands of people each weekend in the fall. The Harvest Hill crash prompted her to take a new look at her safety policies and equipment.

Treworgy’s wagons are low and stable. They’re pulled by tractors. Drivers get safety training.

She didn’t make any changes.

“We feel like we have a safe and good experience, so we carried on,” she said.

The Maine Wildlife Park isn’t making any changes to its annual haunted hayride, either.

The park has been operating its Halloweenfest haunted hayride since 2009, with tractors pulling visitors in enclosed wagons in a 15- to 20-minute ride.

The enclosed wagon ensures no one can fall out or jump. The trail is outside the main area of the park, which lessens the chance that a pedestrian could get run over.

About 2,000 people attend Halloweenfest every year. Park officials estimate two-thirds of those people take the haunted hayride.

“The bottom line is safety is something that’s always been important here,” said Superintendent Curt Johnson. “We have not changed our hayride at all because we felt it was very safe beforehand, in the years past, and it’s very safe today.”

While a number of Maine operators have decided on their own to evaluate their hayrides, many people say the industry as a whole needs regulation.

After the two fatal hayride incidents last year, ASTM International, an organization that creates standards for various industries, decided to create standards for hayrides.

Bates, the hayride safety guru, is chairman of the ASTM task force looking at hayride safety. It’s come up with 38 pages of standards and regulations, including requiring the tow vehicle to have enough weight and power to safely pull a fully loaded wagon, maintaining a barrier between riders and the front edge of the wagon so they can’t fall off and keeping the ride away from steep slopes.

Bates said he’d personally like to see the standards be even more strict — like requiring wagons be pulled by tractors instead of other vehicles — but he believes that

would put small hayride operators out of business and he doesn’t want that.

“It’s a great thing for farmers as long as you do it safely,” he said.

ASTM members voted on the standards in June, but the proposal failed to get enough votes to pass. The task force tweaked the language and put it out for another vote. The results are expected later this month.

If approved, the standards could be adopted by ASTM in the spring. They will then be sent to states to consider for state law.

Maine’s Fire Marshal’s Office says it is interested in them.

Maine will soon have a hayride safety task force of its own.

State Sen. Bob Nutting, R-Oakland, sponsored legislation last spring that would have put haunted hayride oversight under the state Fire Marshal’s Office. His bill ended up passing as a resolve to have the Fire Marshal’s Office, Maine State Police and other stakeholders form a task force for recommendations.

“I’m not sure where the solution lies and I wasn’t really sure where the solution lay when I introduced the bill,” Nutting said. “People should have a reasonable expectation when they get on a commercial hayride that you’re selling tickets to that they will be reasonably safe, that somebody in an authority position has looked at it and deemed that it’s safe, the same as a ride at a circus or a fairgrounds.”

The task force has not yet met, though its report is due in February.

“At this point, still, no one has jurisdiction over hayrides,” said Rich McCarthy of the Maine Fire Marshal’s Office, which has a draft of the latest proposed ASTM standards.

He said his office hadn’t heard from any hayrides seeking guidance this year. Though, surprisingly, he’s heard from operators of safety-conscious haunted walks, asking if they need permits.

Like hayrides, they don’t.

Ricker, whose Nightmare on the Ridge haunted walk kicks off this weekend, said he’s designed the attraction as an easy, 15-minute walk that begins and ends from Wallingford’s store with people returning “hopefully with just a little more adrenaline through them.”

Thirty actors will be stationed inside two corn mazes, creepy buildings and in Wallingford’s apple orchard, popping out for scares and thrills. Black and white sneak peeks posted to Facebook show ominous graveyards and a scarecrow strung up in a cornfield.

“Quite honestly, rides are not as scary as walks,” Ricker said. “We want people to come, enjoy themselves. I don’t want people to ever forget the tragedy and the people involved, but I want people to maybe move on and truly enjoy the Halloween spirit, which many of us have been doing for years.”

## Frank Zappa’s wife dies

BY DAINA BETH SOLOMON  
REUTERS

LOS ANGELES — Gail Zappa, the widow of rock music legend Frank Zappa, died on Wednesday in Los Angeles, her family said. She was 70 years old.

The family did not reveal the cause of death, but said she died at her home surrounded by her children, Moon Unit, Dweezil, Ahmet and Diva.

Born Adelaide Gail Sloatman, she married Frank Zappa at the age of 22. After his death in 1993, she dedicated herself to preserving her husband’s legacy and released numerous unheard recordings from rehearsals and live shows.

“Gail was a doe-eyed, barefooted trailblazer, giving equal value to her domestic and professional responsibilities as matriarch of the family and overseer of all Zappa enterprises,” her family said in a statement.

In running business operations for the Zappa Family Trust, she became an admired advocate for musicians’ rights.

“Gail passionately advocated to establish clear definitions of intellectual property and copyright laws on behalf of not just her husband, but all artists,” the statement said.

According to music magazine Rolling Stone, Gail Zappa released nearly 40 albums after her husband’s death. The latest, “Dance Me This,” marked the 100th record of the celebrated guitarist and songwriter, who died at the age of 52.

## Buxton woman dies in Gorham rollover

CBS 13

GORHAM — A Buxton woman is dead after a crash Wednesday morning on Route 22.

Police say Jacee Johnston, 39, died after the vehicle she was in went off the road and flipped over in a ditch.

County Road was closed for about two hours while police reconstructed the crash. It’s not clear why the vehicle went off the road.

### Obituary Department

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