

# Travel

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2017 | SECTION K | CLEVELAND.COM/TRAVEL

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## Columbus throws a costume party



Costume designer Shiree Houf, right, won first place with her homage to van Gogh's "A Starry Night" in 2016's HighBall show. PHOTOGRAPHS BY RANDALL L. SCHIEBER

## HighBall is a cross between Mardi Gras and an over-the-top fashion show

RICH WARREN | *Special to The Plain Dealer*

**C**OLUMBUS — One model sports a lighted chandelier atop her head. Another wears a hot-air balloon as a headdress. Still another has twisting twin strands erupting from her dress like a giant DNA double helix. ¶ And do those eerie conjoined "twins" really have a puppet theater inside their massive hoop skirt? Yes, they do. ¶ You never know what costumes you'll see strutting down the runway at Columbus' HighBall Halloween, fast becoming one of the top public costume parties in the country. In addition to its outlandish fashion show, the event also features costume contests and a rollicking street party with local musicians who this year are honoring musical legends ranging from Madonna to Beyonce. ¶ This year's 10th annual event, scheduled for Friday and Saturday, also will include a VIP Party and an anniversary ball.



The 10th annual HighBall extravaganza will be held Friday and Saturday in Columbus.

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# PARTY

FROM K1

"Our event embraces the Halloween season, but it's more about fantasy, transformation and costume rather than focusing on what's spooky and gory," said Betsy Pandora, executive director of the Short North Alliance, the non-profit organization that sponsors HighBall. "We prefer to embrace the art of fashion and apparel."

Toward that end, those attending HighBall get into the spirit by putting together cool costumes that go way beyond traditional pirates, devils and zombies. Picture skeletons on stilts, rams with glowing horns, Fred Flintstone driving his car, or even six people who appear to be seated inside a moving roller coaster, complete with waving arms. Those who so choose can compete in a public costume contest.

But it's HighBall's Costume Couture Fashion Show that everyone comes to see. The grand finale of the two-day event, this show features the work of a dozen top fashion designers, competing for a grand prize by creating showstopping costumes that frequently evoke gasps of amazement from the audience.

In addition to gorgeous fabrics rendered into fantastic shapes, the costumes may feature moving parts like spinning pinwheels or plumes of pink smoke. The runway models get into the spirit, sashaying provocatively or duplicating the disjointed movements of mechanical dolls.

With fashion giants such as Victoria's Secret and Abercrombie & Fitch headquartered in Columbus, as well as a sizable community of independent designers and retailers, Ohio's capital city employs the third-highest number of people in the fashion industry in the United States, after New



The Runway Show is the highlight of HighBall, held in the state capital's Short North neighborhood.

ALISON COLVIN

York and Los Angeles. So there's no shortage of design talent to draw from. The Short North area of Columbus, where HighBall is held, also is home to a number of fashion boutiques.

Prospective designers submit a detailed proposal to a committee that's motivated to give the green light to those with the most imaginative and original concepts. Once they get the go-ahead, the designers face many months of daunting work to make something that looked good on paper look just as good on the runway.

## Creative feats and failures, too

About to participate in her sixth HighBall, Shiree Houf of Westerville last year resolved to design a dress paying homage to Vincent van Gogh's painting "The Starry Night." Using a material that could be steamed and then hardened and painted, Houf made the fabric resemble the swirls of van Gogh's night sky. Small lights sporadically

splayed across the garment represented the nighttime stars.

It took hours and hours of labor, and the dress did win first place in 2016, but for Houf an even greater payoff was that she had complete creative freedom.

"The best part of HighBall is we get to pick anything we want to do and can do it any way we like," she said. "That's what I enjoy the most." With a background in theater, Houf likes her designs to have a storytelling component. Expect her to work her magic this year using her favorite Disney childhood movie as a theme.

Other engineering feats don't always work out, as Aaron James of Canal Winchester discovered last year when he couldn't execute a metal cage framework around the model wearing his "Queen of the Night" design.

"There's lots of trial and error to get the most outrageous special effects," said James, a self-taught designer who spent three years in

New York making garments for Broadway shows including "Hamilton" and "The King and I," and helping out with the holiday windows at Saks Fifth Avenue.

James' designs are frequently a "mash-up" of two completely different concepts, like Marie Antoinette meeting Mad Max, "a lot of floral fabric and tulle with accessories like heavy chains, leather, and chunky jewelry," he said. Using "Fairies" as his theme, James' mash-up this year will blend both Elizabethan and tribal aesthetics.

The husband-and-wife design team of Horst and Ms. Steamy, otherwise known as Thomas and Jessica Horst, use felt as their medium of fashion expression, and though the HighBall audience will see the artistry of the costumes, they may not be aware of all the precision that's gone into them.

Horst doesn't just piece together portions of felt to create the designs his wife has created in a process she calls "costume whimsy." Instead,

he creates a single seamless garment molded to the model's body using a precise mathematical formula of his own design. "You could call me a form-fitting fanatic," he said.

Frequently using Goth or punk themes in their designs, the couple, who have residences in Streetsboro and Middlefield, used "Woodland" as their theme last year, creating felt garments of a deer, rabbit, lynx and fox. They promise to be less "costume-y" this year with a theme of "monsters" inspired by the Goth-rock band the Cruxshadows.

## Not your usual fashion show

Celeste Malvar-Stewart will be a novice competitor in HighBall this year, although she's helped out backstage and knows the event to be far from the typical fashion show.

"It's more like Mardi Gras, a really big carnival party," she said. She uses a process of wet-felting wool

## IF YOU GO HighBall Halloween

**When and where:** Friday and Saturday in and around the streets near the Greater Columbus Convention Center, at High and East Goodale streets.  
**Hours:** Festivities start at 6 p.m. Friday and 4 p.m. Saturday; the runway show kicks off at 9:45 p.m. Saturday. Tickets, starting at \$10, are on sale now.  
**Information:** highballcolumbus.org. or 614-299-8050.

and alpaca fibers atop silk fabric to create high-end gowns and dresses. For the brown dye used in this fall's costumes, she's using black walnuts. She competes with neighborhood squirrels to gather them.

For Malvar-Stewart, creating sustainable and ethical clothing is a passion — she not only uses local wool and alpaca fleece in nearly all her work, but also visits the farms where the animals reside to make sure they're being cared for humanely. She's even been known to consider the personality of the individual animal in choosing the fleece to be used with particular models. She's chosen "Piscis," the Latin word for fish, as her theme this year, promising costumes that incorporate an abundance of fishlike scales.

Though HighBall is technically a competition, and the designers' final costumes are meant to be kept a secret until the night of the show, many of the participants care more about the opportunity for creative self-expression.

As Celeste Malvar-Stewart put it: "Technically, yes, HighBall is a contest with a winner and runners-up, but in a venue that's promoting fashion as an art form for us to show off our very best work, aren't we all winners?"

## IF YOU GO Lake Erie Canopy Tours

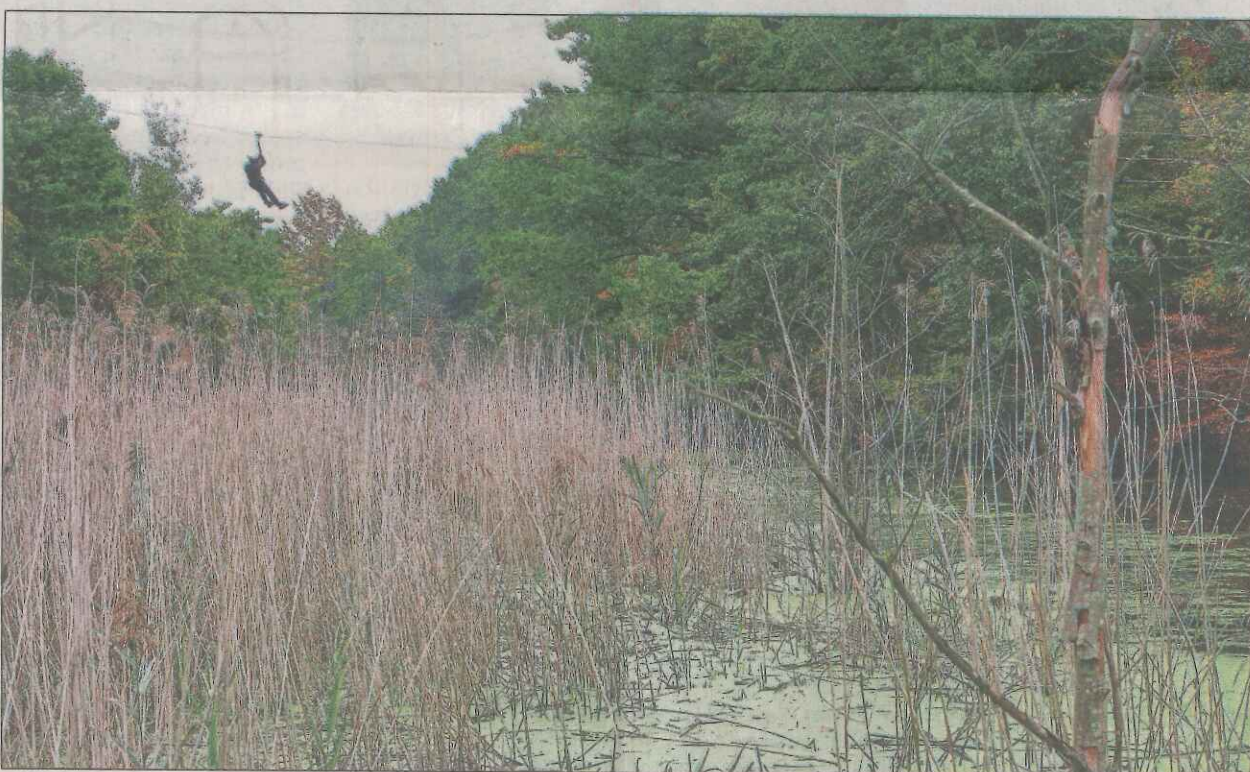
**Hours:** Canopy tours (zipline) at 10 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. Adventure courses 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., with last group at 3 p.m. Open Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays (zipline only on Sunday) through October, possibly into November, depending on the weather, according to canopy tour manager Debbie Post. The facility will reopen in April or May, depending on the weather, with daily operations starting Memorial Day Weekend.

**Tickets:** \$89 for the canopy tour. The adult adventure course is \$49; the kids course is \$19. The office and retail store are located at 4888 North Broadway, adjacent to the Lodge at Geneva-on-the-Lake. Reservations are recommended.

**Information:** lakeeriecanopytours.com or 1-866-601-1973.

## Touring the treetops in Ohio

There may be no better way to enjoy Ohio's fall color show than ziplining through the treetops. Here are some favorite places



Visitors soar over a marsh on the Lake Erie Canopy Tour at Geneva State Park. The course boasts eight ziplines and five skybridges. The longest course is 850 feet long and goes up to 30 mph.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LISA DEJONG | THE PLAIN DEALER

## GENEVA

FROM K1

- Guests are sent aloft one at a time, hanging from cables that stretch from tree to tree, creating a maze of Tarzan-like flights through the forest.
- A 10-minute how-to-zip

Loop, a 40-foot tower in the middle of the forest with numerous launch platforms for extended fun.

One final note about the course: It's built among the treetops set between the resort hotel and the Geneva State Park marina — and at times, both are visible from the canopy towers, as is the

they near the end of the line.

The course was expected to open in midsummer, but weather delays pushed back opening day — as did the theft of \$70,000 worth of equipment from a parked trailer near the construction site, still unsolved, according to police.

Delaware North, the pri-



These are carabiner clips hooked to the belt of Logan Barmess, a guide for the Lake Erie Canopy Tour. Barmess goes through a training session just before a group climbs to the treetops for the zipline. The course uses a "continuous belay system" to secure people to the cables.

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