Most people count the days until Christmas, but not Riley Berg of Port Washington.

She counts down the days to Halloween, or more precisely trick-or-treat day, when she and her friends turn her and her neighbor's normally benign back yards into haunted scenes.

Riley, 14, a freshman at Port Washington High School, makes the scenes all the more realistic with makeup that includes gashes and gouges she creates from silicone rubber and glues onto her willing friends, who enjoy being zombies and spooks. She adds lots of blood red, purple and yellow paint to make the wounds even more gory.

Her dream is to be a makeup artist for horror movies and theater productions.

One of her favorite TV programs is "Face Off," a competition for the best horror prosthetic makeup on the Syfy cable network, where many of Riley's favorite shows air. She also gets tips from YouTube horror makeup videos.

Riley is a normal teenager — a good student and a Trinity Irish dancer since she was 7. It's just that she loves Halloween and horror movies.

As a child, her favorite cartoon was Disney's "The Nightmare Before Christmas," her mother Stacey said.

"She was probably 3, which is bizarre because I don't like anything scary," her mother said. "I didn't go through the haunted house last year. I was too scared."

Riley shrugs off her mother's qualms and appreciates the help her father Larry provides with the sets.

"I just love the creepiness of Halloween," Riley said.

Riley may have inherited her penchant for the macabre from her great-grandmother, whose birthday was Halloween.

"Halloween was her favorite holiday, too," Mrs. Berg said.

The haunted yard started three years ago when Riley and her friends were too old to go trick-or-treating but still wanted to dress up.

The first year, she and four friends created a haunted house for neighborhood children.

This year, 20 freshmen and sophomores will haunt the grounds. Most will stay within the confines of the two yards, but you can never trust a zombie.

Riley and her friends had a chance to preview their routines during the Holy Cross 4-H Haunted Trail at Harrington Beach State Park in the Town of Belgium last Saturday.

Their theme was Zombie Apocalypse.

They hid behind trees and jumped or silently creeped out to scare more than 900 people who went through the trail. The event raised money for Grace Tinder, a 4-H member who was recently diagnosed with leukemia, and the Friends of Harrington Beach State Park.

Riley did the makeup for a dozen friends who had a great time perfecting their zombie stalking and attacks.

It was the first time Riley created so many faces at one time, and she was a little nervous that she wouldn't get them all done in time.

Not to worry. Her expertise was evident as she dug into a huge red case filled with make-up and the ingredients needed to make a variety of face, neck and hand abnormalities.

She got the makeup case for her birthday last year.

The Berg house was a horror show staging area for the Haunted Trail.

While Riley was doing the makeup assembly-line style — with each zombie returning several times for additional gore or touch-ups — her mother and grandmother splattered blood (red food coloring) and paint onto torn pants and shirts for the zombies to wear. One girl wore all black and moved like a shadow.

Anyone who walked by the house got zombie stares or were followed, hastening the innocent's pace.

After the Harrington haunting, Riley carefully removed the wounds from her friends' faces and necks so she can reuse them this Saturday. She will start applying makeup early in the morning to get finished in time for the first trick-or-treaters.

"All my friends are amazing because they let me do what I want to them," Riley said. "I could not do this without them. They put up with all my craziness."

The Berg's haunted yard will be a little less scary during daylight hours of trick-or-treat, which

runs from 4 to 7 p.m.

Saturday, Oct. 27, in Port, but will become more frightful as darkness descends. Friends and classmates plan to show up in the evening.

The haunted yard is optional. Children will receive treats even if they don't go through the yard, but those who survive will have bragging rights.

The haunted yard at 341 N. Milwaukee St. is free. Canned and nonperishable food will be collected for the Food Pantry in Port Washington.

Image Information: Makeup artist Riley Berg was surrounded by zombies (front row, from left) Troy Burris, Dallas Erickson, Will Schanen, Kim Cawley, Natalie
DeMerit, (back row) Charlie Cofta, Ben Klein, Skyler Sandlin and Jack Buser.