

What's Up, College Station? Transcript

Season 4, Episode 35

Grace Hollowell: What's up, College Station? I'm Grace Hollowell, and today I'm joined by Parks and Recreation Activities Assistant Patrick Lewis. Welcome back, Patrick.

Patrick Lewis: Hello. It's good to be back.

Grace Hollowell: I think the last time we had you on the show, you were in full wizard garb. So you're regular Patrick today?

Patrick Lewis: Except without a beard.

Grace Hollowell: Without a beard?

Patrick Lewis: It might be shocking for some people, so I'm pretty excited to have fall weather here, and hopefully it gets cold. I don't know if it will, but...

Grace Hollowell: I know it dipped down into the 90s this week and I felt the breeze, so we're getting there.

Patrick Lewis: Yes, I'm crossing my fingers and dotting my eyes.

Grace Hollowell: Today we are going to talk about a lot of fun fall Parks and Rec activities and events that we have planned. To kick things off for our viewers who may not know, tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do.

Patrick Lewis: I work with Parks and Rec here at the City of College Station. This is my hometown—I take a lot of pride in it because as a kid, I went to a lot of these programs. I remember going to Little League baseball games and Christmas in the Park. A lot of these activities and programs mean a lot to me, and the town's been good to me. I want to make sure I give back to the town that helped raise me. I take a lot of pride in our campouts, our Learn to Fish programs, and all that we do here.

Grace Hollowell: Absolutely. That's a great way to put it—you want to give back to the town that helped make you who you are.

Patrick Lewis: Precisely.

Grace Hollowell: Since we are in a transition season from summer to fall, what changes for you and your job during this time of year?

Patrick Lewis: When summer ends, it begins our planning phase for the fall. We have a rough outline, and we always plan around football games because we have those. But we also get to plan around fun holidays like Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. I feel like all the best holidays are in the fall along with the good weather. That's always been a joy, planning those things.

Grace Hollowell: What is your favorite part about your job this time of year?

Patrick Lewis: I think my favorite part is actually seeing the programs in action, where I can have those one-on-one interactions with the people who come or witness the results of our labor. Trying to make the event impactful for the community and seeing those moments between a father and son or mother and daughter, knowing that they're making memories that will last a long time.

Grace Hollowell: For people who may be new to the area, they don't realize that while we are a college town and love our Aggie football, we also have a lot of families here. A lot of our programs that the Parks and Rec Department puts on are geared toward families. Like you mentioned, Park in the Dark and the campouts stick out to me as big family traditions that people go to year after year. It's a really great opportunity to showcase our parks.

Patrick Lewis: Fall is also a great time for planting. At the Nature Center, we collect wildflower seeds. If you want a lot of beautiful flowers that come up in the spring, October through December is a great time to plant. If you ever need free seeds, you can come to the Gary Halter Nature Center and we will give out free seeds so you have more native plants to help the monarchs, butterflies, and birds.

Grace Hollowell: How can people contact you if they have questions about getting free seeds or anything else we talk about today?

Patrick Lewis: You can contact the Nature Center at 979-764-6216. We have staff there Monday through Sunday. You can email plewis@cstx.gov, call my office at 979-680-4108, or meet me in person. I like to be around the Nature Center, and if I see someone, I'll go out of my way to say, "Welcome to the Gary Halter Nature Center!" It could be their first time, and I want them to have a good experience and share my knowledge so they can cater their experience as best they can.

Grace Hollowell: Growing up, I spent a lot of time at my local nature center, and I still have memories of walking through and seeing all the displays. They had a box where you stick your hand in to see what you're touching—whether it's a pinecone or a rock—which was terrifying for me, but a lot of kids had fun with that. Speaking of terrifyingly fun things, that goes hand-in-hand with the Haunted Hike, which is back again. What can our residents expect from this after-dark adventure at Lick Creek Park?

Patrick Lewis: This is our third year doing it, which means we're doing something right. We plan to mix up the different monsters and cryptids on our trail. We're not doing a movie this year, but we plan to have festival booths and activities so you can fill out the time before or after your hike. Weather permitting and burn ban status allowing, we got a bigger fire pit for spooky s'mores, where you can combine different candies with marshmallows and graham crackers.

Grace Hollowell: The hike focuses on local cryptids, including two prairie devils, Gator Man, and Sasquatch. For someone unfamiliar with cryptids, what are they and why did you choose them as a theme?

Patrick Lewis: Cryptids are local mythos—living legends or tall tales from before science was advanced. People saw things in the dark, so there's a sense of whimsy and mystery. Sasquatch represents a prehistoric creature that hasn't been discovered yet, bringing back that sensation of discovery in a world where it feels like there are no frontiers left. It ties into folktales passed down through oral tradition and brings wonder to Halloween.

Grace Hollowell: It's the perfect setting for a fun night at Lick Creek during the Halloween season. How does exploring Lick Creek Park at night change the experience compared to visiting during the day?

Patrick Lewis: It's a completely different atmosphere because you don't have the safety of daylight. You only see what's directly in front of you. A lot more creatures come out at night, like barn owls and bats. We do have snakes, but by the end of October, they shouldn't be as active because they're preparing for hibernation. There are also different types of insects that can be surprisingly disturbing and fascinating at the same time. Our whole point is to show you what you can see when you don't typically go out at that time of day, in a safe way.

Grace Hollowell: For the extra activities at the Haunted Hangout, what can participants enjoy once they finish their hike?

Patrick Lewis: We plan to have s'mores, a mask-making station, pumpkin pong, a tilt game, and maybe the soccer dartboard, cornhole, and dragon claw origami. There is a lot you can fold with simple paper.

Grace Hollowell: While this is all in good fun, it can be a little scary. What age group would enjoy the Haunted Hike the most, or are there any age restrictions?

Patrick Lewis: We keep it 13 and up, similar to a PG-13 rating. There will be jump scares, but no excess blood, and the monsters won't touch you. It's designed for ages 13 and up to enjoy.

Grace Hollowell: What is one thing you hope participants take away from the Haunted Hike, besides a few spooky stories?

Patrick Lewis: Good memories and good laughs. Last year, one participant accidentally entered through the exit and went through the hike in reverse. Our monsters didn't know, so as the participant was walking through, they were sneaking up on the monsters! All I heard was screaming in the distance—they definitely had a memorable moment.

Grace Hollowell: Switching gears from spooky trails to the high seas, tell us about the D&D *Boundless Blue* campaign.

Patrick Lewis: The *Boundless Blue* campaign is set in an over-the-top ocean world, similar to *Pirates of the Caribbean* or *One Piece*. The idea is a fantastical world without big continental lands, where you travel across undiscovered waters, visiting different islands and seeing what happens.

Grace Hollowell: For someone who has heard of Dungeons & Dragons through shows like *Stranger Things* but has never played, how would you explain the game?

Patrick Lewis: Dungeons & Dragons is cooperative storytelling with math rocks. You roll the dice to see if you succeed at a task and respond accordingly. It involves problem-solving as a group—sometimes through combat, other times through diplomacy, cunning, or solving puzzles. It's an excuse to hang out in person with friends and create a story together.

Grace Hollowell: It's a great chance to be creative.

Patrick Lewis: Absolutely.

Grace Hollowell: This campaign is beginner-friendly. How approachable is it for someone with no prior D&D experience?

Patrick Lewis: Our Dungeon Master and I will be there to help guide you. We use tools like D&D Beyond and have pre-made character sheets available so you can jump right in, or we can guide you through creating your own character.

Grace Hollowell: The games take place at the Gary Halter Nature Center. When are they and what are the times?

Patrick Lewis: The times are 5:30 PM to 10:30 PM. We chose that window so we can run a full "one-shot" mini-adventure covering character roleplay, exploration, and combat—the three pillars of D&D. Playing at the Nature Center immerses you in the natural environment, which fits right into the game.

Grace Hollowell: When is the Haunted Hike, and is registration required?

Patrick Lewis: Registration is required. It is on October 19th.

Grace Hollowell: What else do we have going on at Lick Creek Park and the Nature Center this fall?

Patrick Lewis: We have Mud Day, a free event where kids are allowed to get muddy at the park. We also host invasive plant pulls for anyone who wants to help remove invasive species, propagate seeds, or learn about gardening. Additionally, we offer our Learn to Fish program, where you can learn how to fish and navigate Texas Parks and Wildlife Department regulations.

Grace Hollowell: Before we leave, let's do a quick lightning round of fall and Halloween questions. Ready?

Patrick Lewis: Ready.

Grace Hollowell: Favorite mythical creature or cryptid?

Patrick Lewis: Probably Sasquatch.

Grace Hollowell: Favorite Halloween movie?

Patrick Lewis: *Hocus Pocus*. I watched that a lot as a kid.

Grace Hollowell: Classic s'mores or Halloween candy?

Patrick Lewis: S'mores.

Grace Hollowell: If you could have one D&D character class in real life, which would you choose?

Patrick Lewis: Ranger. My favorite spell would be *Speak with Animals* so I could talk to my dog. It would also give me the skills to navigate nature and help guide people safely.

Grace Hollowell: Finally, your favorite thing about fall and Halloween in College Station?

Patrick Lewis: Cooler weather and football season.

Grace Hollowell: Thank you so much for joining me today.

Patrick Lewis: Glad to be here.

Grace Hollowell: And that's what's up!

