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Witch who owns area store loves holiday

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MANSFIELD

Some witches have a love-hate relationship with Halloween, the secular and increasingly commercial descendant of a high pagan holiday.

But Karen Jette Benson, the owner of Andromeda's Alley, the new "New Age Metaphysical" store on North Main Street and herself a practicing witch, embraces it.

"I love Halloween - it's my favorite time of the year," Benson said Friday from the shop. "I do the whole Hollywood witch thing with the hat and the bonfire with my family. Then later, I do more personal rituals."

Those more personal rituals start at midnight, when Samhain, the ancient Celtic end-of-harvest festival celebrated by modern day Wiccans and other neopagans, begins. Most of the rituals involve communicating with ancestors and other spirits, Benson said.

"It's a time to celebrate life," said Dennis Callahan, a witch who does psychic readings at Andromeda's Alley. "You have to celebrate the light with the dark. Samhain is the time when the veil between the world's is the thinnest."

Benson, a Mansfield High School graduate who lives in Walpole, discovered the storefront at 110 North Main Street that would become Andromeda's Alley during a drive through town with her son. A "for rent" sign hung in the window and something about the place just drew her in.

"It chose me," Benson said.

The store sells crystals, candles, incense, jewelry, New Age books and an assortment of spiritual tools.

But as much as a retail space, the shop serves as a local hub for psychic readings, herbalists, Tarot clinics and all manner of spiritual counseling.

Benson wants the community to know that the shop is not just for witches, but for anyone who wants to connect spiritually with the natural world. On good days, Benson says the shop acts as a kind of community counseling center where "everybody knows your name."