

# Witches' New Year an important tradition, local witches say

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Samhain, or Witches' New Year, bears great significance in the witch community, said the high priestess of a local coven.

Queen Lady Passion, the host of the Asheville celebration of Witches' New Year, said she started practicing daily witchcraft in 1976 and later became the high priestess of Coven Oldenwilde, a traditional Wiccan coven based in Asheville in 1994.

"My innate magical abilities drew me to the craft of the wise," said Lady Passion, who preferred to use her magical name. "I was born psychic and revealed this talent to others at age 5. I declared myself publicly as a witch at 13. I have practiced and aided others daily with it ever since."

Lady Passion, 55, said her craft contains great spiritual depth seldom seen in other religions. She said the magical aspect was based on common sense that continues to be applicable regardless of changing times.

"Adherents of the old religion are encouraged to master and creatively use their magical talents to help themselves, others and the planet at large, to live freely with minimal constraint, dismissive of what crazes others, such as original sin, hell, or a one-shot life," Lady Passion said.

The Rev. David McCanless, a priest at the Basilica of Saint Lawrence in downtown Asheville, said there are a few sections of the Catholic faith that discuss witchcraft and magic.

"As many sociologists have commented, one difference between traditional religion and magic seems to be that religious persons believe in supernatural forces, but do not seek to control these," McCanless said. "Witchcraft, on the other hand, does."

McCanless referred to a section from the Catechism of the Catholic church saying magic in all forms, even if performed with good intentions, is

contradictory to the religion and its values.

"Spiritism often implies divination or magical practices; the church for her part warns the faithful against it," according to the catechism.

Katherine de Vos Devine said she started practicing witchcraft more than 25 years ago with a few lapses. She said when she was a child, she openly rejected the misogyny of her Methodist and Episcopal upbringing and was drawn instead to feminist witch practices.

"Magic is in the mundane," de Vos Devine said. "If I'm creating an internet password, I'll create something significant out of a rune, a goddess' name, a desire, etc., because I'm typing it over and over again. This mundane practice is thus invested with something extra. Lots of that, all day, every day."

Lady Passion said each year's Samhain celebration has a different theme, drawing from various ancient practices from around the world. She said this year's "Broom and Brew" Samhain will be different from the past years' festivities.

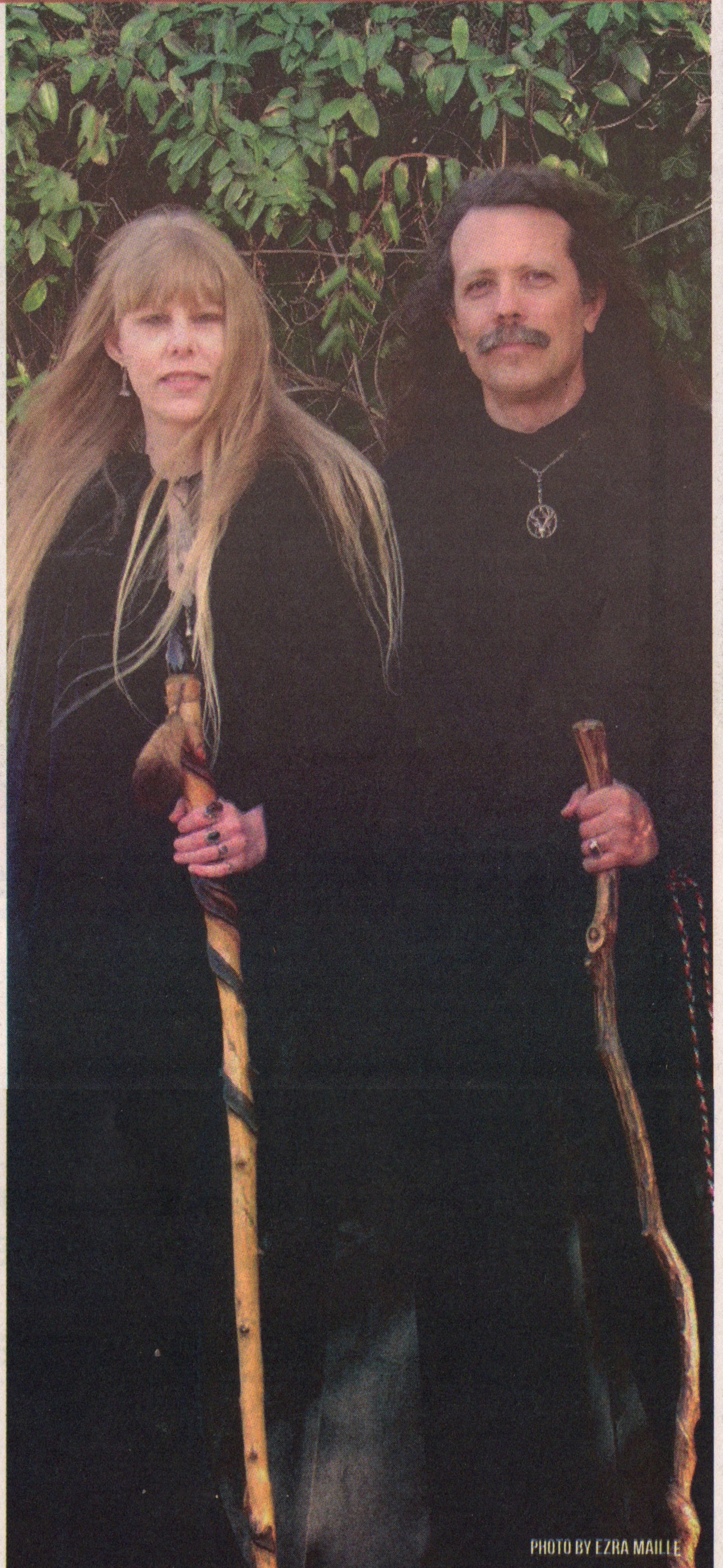
"After having done 20 years of family-friendly Samhains outdoors in area parks, I now host teens and adults in my three-story West Asheville covenstead," Lady Passion said.

Lady Passion said she greets all participants of Samhain while handing out candy to trick-or-treaters. She said once everyone has gathered, she gives each participant a keepsake, this year's being a silver broom pendant strung on a red or black cord.

"Then I cast circle either in my backyard wildlife habitat or in my ritual room and we direct spellwork based on the theme," Lady Passion said.

Lady Passion said the rituals she will perform this Samhain involve helping the deceased pass to the afterlife prior to reincarnation with typical practices involving natural ingredients and the collective group of participants

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High Priestess Queen Lady Passion and High Priest \*Diuvei host Samhain 2018 at Coven Oldenwilde in West Asheville.

## LOCAL WITCHES

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working together.

"Witches use our powers to heal naturally, many witches work in health care, counsel, divine the future, advise, educate and empower others," said Lady Passion, a registered nurse for the past 30 years. "We perpetuate tried and true traditions that enable folks oppressed by the 'evil' elite."

Lady Passion said after the rituals are complete, all participants enjoy food and drink while socializing or asking her magical questions. She said at the end of the festivities, participants go their separate ways or stay the night in one of the coven's many bedrooms.

“MAGIC IS IN THE MUNDANE,”

— Katherine de Vos Devine

De Vos Devine, who works as the interim executive director of the North Carolina Glass Center, an Asheville-based art school, said Samhain is a very important time of year for witches as it can be easiest to access ancestors or deities. She said she will celebrate Samhain at a later date as

she will not be able to attend Samhain at Coven Oldenwilde because she will be out trick-or-treating with her children.

"When it wasn't quite as safe to be an out witch, Halloween always felt like the safest time," de Vos Devine said. "That said, it can be a bit annoying. The commercialization of witchcraft can be an irritating reminder of the Christian and capitalist appropriation of pagan ceremonies and practices."

*The Witches' Broom and Brew: Samhain 2018 will be held Oct. 31 at 7 p.m. at Coven Oldenwilde's covenstead at 113 Clinton Ave in West Asheville. Participants are encouraged to bring a broom or a staff.*

