UI launches online guide to events

By Paul Wood

URBANA – A comprehensive guide to University of Illinois events in Champaign-Urbana and throughout the state is now up at a website.

The portal at engage.illinois.edu includes, among 900 upcoming events, the movie, "Night of the Living Dead"; a wine party, "Krannert Uncorked"; tours of Japan House; "The Strange Life of Objects: The Art of Annette Lemieux"; a 4-H Air Rifle Workshop; "The Physics of Genes and Why It Matters to You"; and "So You Think You've Heard Ghost Stories."

Steve Sonka, the interim vice chancellor for public engagement, said the UI wanted a cohesive site for all events on campus and through Extension.

The portal requires minimal effort from contributors because it links back to original calendar postings in a plethora of UI units.

Sonka said it took about $120,000 in programmer and developer time to come up with the portal, but it's impossible to count the unpaid effort put in by students, faculty and staff over almost two years.

Even before this week's formal launch, portal entries already receive more than 2,500 visits a month.

"It's a step toward more effective engagement. It's a good step, only one of a continuing effort," Sonka said.

The evolving effort will be discussed at a noon information session Nov. 15 at 505 E. Green St., C. More information is available at engage.illinois.edu/signup.

Program coordinator Shelley Mix said the effort reduces duplication among units at the UI.

"Behind it, there are a lot of events pulled in from Extension or campus calendars. This puts in all in one place and is searchable," she said, giving Halloween events as an example.

To post to the portal, users can employ their original calendar work. Sonka said students monitor the entries "to maintain some human input in it."

"People can enter in events manually, but why do it if there's already a calendar," Mix said.

The portal has support from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Public Engagement, but the
Office for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in the College of Education maintains it, a release noted.