

JUST FOLKS

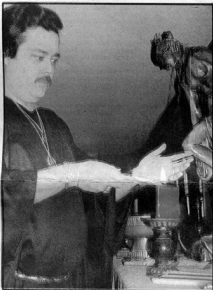


Photo special to Marietta Daily Journal

Lord Starhawk, a Ravenwood elder, lights a candle on the Wiccan altar in preparation for Hallowmas. The ceremony honors the passage of power from the Wiccan Goddess — represented by the female statue — to the Wiccan God.

Coven members hope to dispel witchly myths

By Gina Piccolo

Marietta Daily Journal Staff Writer

They don't worship the devil, sacrifice animals, drink blood, eat children, fly on broomsticks or condone free sex.

In fact, as the witches gathered for Halloween on Saturday — children, cupcakes and mini-vans in tow — stereotypes, not witches, flew out the window.

"They're not running around in black, dangling pentagrams," said Lady Sirtana, the 57-year-old High Priestess of Ravenwood, metro Atlanta's largest coven of followers of the religion of Wicca.

Unless, of course, it's Hallowmas, tonight's Wiccan new

year. On this night, the witches say, the veil between this world and the next is the thinnest.

Then Wiccans don their ceremonial black robes (symbolizing the darkness of winter) and join their Magic Circle for an evening of chanting, meditation and celebration. Hallowmas — also called Samhain — is a time to mourn the dead, honor the coming of winter and, more recently, talk to the media.

But the Wiccans don't mind the scrutiny. In fact, they seem to cherish the opportunity to dispel myths.

"Most people think of us in

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