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Ghost busters want a crack at courthouse

By WILL MALONE

FOR THE COURIER

A band of paranormal investigators from Bellefontaine hopes to find something spookier in the Seneca County Courthouse than the spectre of bond interest payments and unresolved space needs issues.

Buckeye State Paranormal and Haunting Investigators, which boasts it is the only paranormal group accepted as a member of the Ohio Association of Historical Societies and Museums, wants a crack at documenting some non-corporeal traffic inside the historic 1884 building. The group submitted a written request to the commissioners this week for an opportunity to investigate the building's harrowing halls.

Commissioner Dave Sauber said during a board meeting he knows one of the organization's members from high school and suggested giving the investigators a shot at the downtown courthouse before any renovation or new construction occurs.

"Grand old lady's still sitting over there," he said. "Maybe we'd want to see if there's anybody floating around in there."

At one point during the meeting, Commissioner Michael Bridinger teased developer Franklin Conaway about whether he had witnessed anything eerie during his frequent inspections of the building.

The board plans to contact the group to sign liability forms, before letting it set up equipment for overnight surveillance.

"I think it's something that a lot of people believe in," Sauber said.

Gene Lafferty describes his eclectic crew of 40 investigators — including teachers, engineers and other professionals — as "hopeful skeptics."

"A place with this kind of history, there's always a possibility that it's going to have some sort of activity," Lafferty said. "You just never really know."

The group takes a scientific approach to its investigations, eschewing psychics for some reliable technology: infrared and night vision cameras, thermal imagers, digital recorders — in all about \$20,000 worth of ghost-catching gadgets.

Pending approval from the commissioners, the group wants to explore the courthouse for about five or six hours on one night before returning with its findings within the next couple of weeks. It would be the group's first courthouse investigation.

The courthouse came to Buckeye Paranormal's attention because some of its members are area residents. The location fits with its penchant for historical buildings, especially those being considered for restoration. Lafferty said his group's investigations often shore up funding for historical renovation efforts.

"Almost every museum we go to, they will tell us that we were the biggest fundraiser they've ever had just because the people we draw in there," he said.

In the past, the group investigated Mary Lou Johnson-Hardin County District Library, Bear's Mill, Logan County Museum, General McPherson's house in Clyde and several other regional historic sites.

The group typically donates \$10 per person to the organization which owns the building. According to Lafferty, the group is bonded for up to \$10,000 and all members sign a waiver of liability.

Nearly every member of the group is a history buff, Lafferty said, so visiting the buildings is almost as exciting as the prospect of paranormal activity.

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