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Ghost busters want a crack at courthouse

By WILL MALONE

Staff Writer

A band of paranormal investigators from Bellefontaine hope 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 that 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 county commissioners this week for an opportunity to investigate the harrowing halls that lead to the county's Common Pleas and Juvenile courts.

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

"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 about signing liability forms before setting up equipment for overnight undead 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 would like to explore the courthouse for about five or six hours on one night before returning with its findings within the next couple of weeks. This would be the first courthouse investigation for the group.

The Seneca courthouse came to Buckeye Paranormal's attention because some of its members hail from the area. The location fits in neatly with its penchant for historical buildings, especially those being considered for restoration. Lafferty said his group's investigation often shore up funding for historical renovation and restoration 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 wrote to the commissioners, Buckeye Paranormal investigated Mary Lou Johnson-Hardin County District Library, Bear's Mill, Logan County Museum, General McPherson's mansion in Clyde and several other regional historic locations.

The group typically donates \$10 per person to the organization that owns the building. According to Lafferty, the group is bonded for up to \$10,000 and all members have signed a waiver of liability to protect the location being investigated.

Nearly every member of the group is an unabashed history buff, Lafferty said. So much so that visiting the buildings is almost as exciting as the prospect of paranormal activity.

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