

Zak's restaurant is a hotbed of ghostly activity



Written by

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ZANESVILLE -- In her bones, Jodie Miller knows there are things that go bump in the night. She wanted to see some proof.

"I believe in it," the Zanesville woman said about paranormal and ghostly activity. "I watch TAPS (The Atlantic Paranormal Society featured on the Syfy show 'Ghost Hunters'). It's popular because this stuff is really happening."

While an impromptu ghost hunt was not a possibility, she wanted to hear of evidence from those who experienced a brush with the other side firsthand. She joined an enthusiastic crowd Thursday evening that filled the back dining area of Zak's restaurant on Third Street.

The Southeastern Ohio Paranormal Investigators recently spent the night in the downtown eatery to dig into claims that the old structure may be haunted. After carefully reviewing their evidence, they wanted to present their findings to the

public in the midst of the "spooky" locale.

"On Sept. 25, 2010, we brought seven people in here to spend the night from 6 p. m. to 6 a.m.," said Michelle Duke, SEOPI co-founder and lead investigator. "We're all skeptics who go into an investigation trying to debunk reports and scrutinize the evidence."

As the evening began, Tom Robson, fellow co-founder, tech manager and lead investigator with SEOPI, gave the crowd an overview of the group and the equipment used during investigations.

Intrigued by the paranormal, Robson and Duke began ghost hunting 15 years ago. Once TV shows like "Ghost Hunters" and "Ghost Adventures" picked up in popularity, the pair formed SEOPI in 2007. There are 13 members who have traveled the tri-state area embarking on paranormal quests.

Items used during hunts include various digital and video cameras, temperature

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and EMF (electromagnetic frequency) detectors, digital voice recorders, and K-II meters. A K-II meter measures EMFs, which are displayed with flashing L.E.D. lights to indicate fluctuations. Another piece used by the group was constructed by Robson -- a small box that lights up when it picks up vibrations and seismic activity.

Gary Felumlee, SEOPI historian, gave a brief history of the building. He traced the structure's history to the late 1890s, and it was often used as a warehouse. The basement features a "hidden passage" that was used to store barrels of beer and other alcohol. It has only belonged to two families -- the Perry Wiles family, who used it for warehouse and storage purposes, and the Zakany family, who assumed ownership and turned the building into a restaurant in 1977. Al and Susan Zakany are the current building/restaurant owners.

Felumlee said it's important to delve into the history of a building, as well as the people attached to it when embarking on investigations.

The group was curious to see if they had any encounters with entities like a man who was killed after falling down and elevator shaft in 1913, and check out reports by restaurant staff of misting, whispering and physical contact.

"Ninety-five percent of the time, you can explain what's going on, but here we can't explain what happened," Duke said. "It's a very active place. On the upper floors, especially the fourth floor, we recorded shadow figures, light anomalies and lots of

voices. We recorded 20 EVPs (electronic voice phenomena), and that's high for a place. We heard voices and footsteps in areas where nobody else was around, once we heard a 'get out,' and we got a lot of responses with a K-II meter."

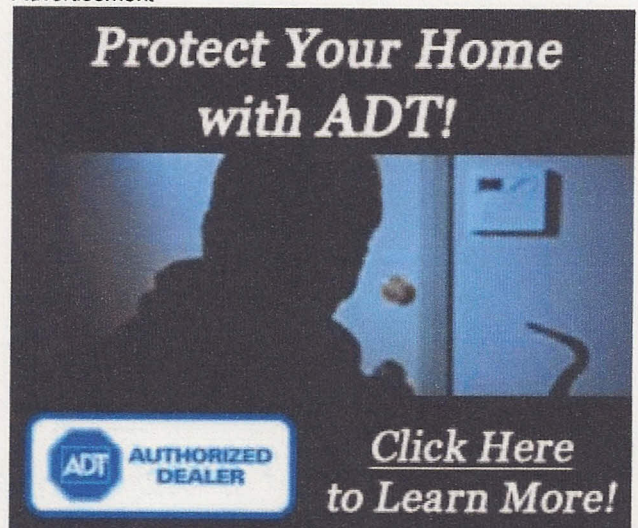
Duke said when investigating the basement area that was used to store alcohol during Prohibition, the meter picked up energies when questions were asked like "do you like whisky?" and "do you want us to leave?" One EVP that was picked up upon their exit was "thank you," she said.

"It can be overwhelming, but there's nothing malicious here," Duke said. "Overall it was a good night, and I want to thank the Zakany's for letting us be here. We had the chance to see what people don't normally get to see of this building."

For more information about the Southeastern Ohio Paranormal Investigators, go to www.seohiopi.com.

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