

# Beware: Haunted Houses Are a Scream

By Jeff Bahr

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Visiting a haunted house is like surviving a night of the living dead.

Those who enter a structure at their own risk experience a tentative and sometimes terrifying excursion into the dark.

Ghouls, monsters and goblins — all quite ghastly — await unsuspecting patrons at every corner. There are plenty of other surprises, too. But beware: These haunted houses are not suitable for children ages 5 and younger.

At the Mystery Manor, 716 N. 18th St., visitors come face to face with a talking head resting on a chain saw.

The tour includes a harrowing ride down a 65-foot stainless steel slide that descends three stories and has two 90-degree turns.

The tour ends with a journey down a shorter slide into the rear of an ambulance.

## Imposing Figure

An imposing figure armed with a chain saw lurks outside the Vintage KOIL 1290 Stone Castle of Terror near 20th and Center Streets. The man, who reports that he uses about a gallon of fuel a week, spooks approaching visitors.

Upon entry, visitors are met with an attraction called a Revolving Room. They must choose safe passage through the Six Doors of Doom and survive encounters with the Arachnophon, the Killer Semi and other attractions in Christine's Revenge and Insane Wards.

Genesis V's Haunted House at 15th and California Streets features a compelling attraction called Changeover, in which a man seated in a chair is transformed into a skeleton.

The facility also offers three mazes, the Pinhead Room and the Stairway to Hell.

People like to be tricked as well as treated, operators say, which is why they find haunted houses such a scream.

"People love to be scared. They really do," said Brad Finkle, project chairman of the Stone Castle. "That's why they like to go to scary movies like 'Friday the 13th' and 'Halloween.'"

Operators of haunted houses apparently do their jobs well. Long lines are common outside many of the facilities, which typically are open



Jeff Bundy/World-Herald

What evil lurks in yonder darkness? A spooky character or two ... Roger Porter confronts Kathy Wolf as she leads Pam Berger (partially hidden) and Diane Kelly through the Mystery Manor at 716 N. 18th St. At right is Mike MacDonald.

from mid-October through Halloween, Oct. 31.

Wayne Sealy, owner of Mystery Manor, said patrons have waited in line two hours some Friday and Saturday nights.

Proceeds from the Stone Castle benefit the Stage Door volunteer pro-

house. Finkle, a production assistant at the Playhouse, is president-elect of the Stage Door.

He noted that considerable theater expertise goes into the creation of the haunted house.

"It's just like a production at the Playhouse," Finkle said, adding that high school drama students are among the volunteers.

- It's a good thing Finkle enjoys his work. "A lot of people like Christmas. I like Halloween," he said, adding a ghoulish chuckle.

Sealy prefers to call the Mystery Manor a haunted theater rather than a haunted house. His facility, he said, makes use of sophisticated special effects and prosthetic devices, as well as large-scale images.

"Some of the illusions in this house

## Out of Nowhere

The Mystery Manor, he said, also benefits because it has operated out of the same location for seven years. The volunteer staff is well-trained and experienced, and safety is a priority.

The Manor also appears to be popular. "I've had people come through this house six times in one night," Sealy said.

At Genesis V's Haunted House, the emphasis is on unadulterated fright. "What we strive to do is scare people," said Mark Miller, one of the owners.

The goal is accomplished with costumed volunteers who pop out of nowhere. "You don't know where

the scary stuff is coming out of. It's an old house that looks as though it could be haunted. Hours are from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday; 7 p.m. to midnight Friday and Saturday. Admission is \$4 per person. Discounts are offered Monday through Thursday by presenting a canned good for the needy or a coupon available at Hardee's restaurants. Proceeds benefit the Nebraska Special Olympics.

The Stone Castle of Terror is open from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. Sunday through

## Fire Safety Is Priority Of Officials

Prior to 1988, there were no state or municipal codes that specifically governed haunted houses in Omaha.

Two years ago, the Omaha Fire Prevention Bureau changed that, said Capt. Charlie Bruno.

Guidelines were established because haunted houses were erected "in old, condemned houses that were getting to be kind of a hazard," the official said.

Bureau representatives "sat down and listed some specific things that have to be done to open a haunted house."

The guidelines address fire and safety concerns by requiring the use of flame-retardant structural materials, installation of fire extinguishers, emergency and exit lighting and smoke detectors.

Multiple-level buildings must have a "hard-wired" smoke detection system which operates from a central alarm panel.

In addition, the bureau places strong emphasis on fire drills and evacuation techniques, Bruno said.

The City of Omaha, the bureau official said, no longer allows haunted houses in semitrailers. "We think those are definite hazards."

Three or four years ago, Bruno said, six or seven haunted houses operated within city limits. This year, there are three.

Current regulations contributed to — but were not the sole factor in

opening a haunted house involves a lot of work."

It's difficult to say whether some operators moved their enterprises outside city limits in order to escape compliance with safety regulations, the captain said.

Operators generally cooperate, he said. "They're concerned with public safety." Wayne Sealy, owner of the Mystery Manor at 716 N. 18th

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