

# Love of Fright Fuels Hauntingly Hot Business

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and run by volunteers can raise a lot of money in a short period of time, said Lori Trautman, division director for the Southeast Nebraska Division of the March of Dimes.

The organization's six trailers at 108th and Fort Streets cost about \$3,000 to rent and decorate, she said. Matched against projected revenues of perhaps \$20,000, that leaves \$17,000 for the March of Dimes.

**Derelect's Den**  
Expenses are higher at other haunted houses. The KQKQ Radio Derelect's Den probably will cost \$10,000 to operate, said Terry Moore, Omaha Federation of Labor president who is one of the organizers. That includes a \$3,000 donation to the Pottawattamie County Democratic Party, which provides some of the volunteer monsters and spooks, he said.

Total receipts may reach \$30,000, leaving \$20,000 to be split evenly among the radio station, also known as Sweet 88, the labor union and the Septemberfest committee.

At the Mystery Manor at 716 N. 18th St., operating costs are as much as \$10,000 to \$15,000, not counting radio station KOIL's one-third share of the remaining money. The station probably will earn \$7,000 to \$8,000 for its month of extensive promotion.

Unlike other houses, the Mystery Manor is not tied to a specific charity. It is a permanent house operated by a business, SSS Enterprises Inc.

Legally, co-owners Gene Snitily, Wayne Sealy and Dick Sanders could pocket the profits from the house.

**Divided Among Charities**  
They said they don't pay themselves a dime, but divide all of the profits among Omaha charities designated by the house's volunteer workers.

For example, if volunteers work a total of 5,000 hours, and \$15,000 is left after expenses and KOIL's share, each volunteer hour is worth \$3. The volunteers designate which charities should get the money, and the Mystery Manor writes a check for the total number of hours worked on behalf of each group, Snitily said.

That goes for the three owners as agency Services received a check that reflected all the time he worked on the house, he said.

"Some people think we're crazy for (giving the money away)," Sanders said.

He said the three owners are committed to giving their profits to charity, just as they did when they worked to set up houses for the March of Dimes and Gross High School.

**'Proud Trend Setters'**  
By owning the house, Sanders said, the three set their own budget and take pride in being "trend setters" in the local haunted house industry.

"Between the three of us, we've got more ideas than we can put into any house," Snitily said.

If they eventually sell the Mystery Manor, their company will receive any proceeds, Sanders acknowledged. The trio offered their own personal houses as collateral when they borrowed money to buy the house two years ago, he said.

The UNICEF haunted barn in Papillion is sponsored by the Vietnam Veterans of America, but president Dick Beal said the group is giving 10 percent of the net profits to two men who did much of the work. UNICEF will get the rest — as much as \$10,000, he said.

Ideally, Beal said, the barn would be operated on an all-volunteer basis. But the veterans group became involved only one month ago and had to make arrangements with the two men, he said.

**'Love to Be Frightened'**  
Omaha apparently has no haunted houses operated strictly for profit. But



Witch Gayle Dollard and ghoulish bride Sandy Droddy welcome patrons to "mortuary" ... first stop at Mystery Manor.

## Haunted Houses Help Public Services

Here are some of the local haunted houses and the organizations that receive the proceeds:

- KOIL Radio Mystery Manor, 716 N. 18th St. Admission \$3.** Owned by SSS Enterprises Inc. After expenses, KOIL receives one-third of the money. The remaining two-thirds is divided among charities designated by volunteer workers.
- March of Dimes Tomb of Terror, Hy-Vee parking lot at 108th and Fort Streets. Admission \$2.** Operated by Southeast Nebraska Chapter, March of Dimes.
- UNICEF Haunted Barn, Tara Hills Golf Course, 1001 Limerick Road, Papillion. Admission \$2.50 for adults, \$2 for children under 12.** Sponsored by Vietnam Veterans of America. After expenses, 10 percent goes to UNICEF.
- KQKQ Radio Derelect's Den, 2002 Davenport St. Admission \$3.** The Pottawattamie County Democratic Party receives \$3,000. After subtracting that money and other expenses, the rest is divided equally among the Omaha Federation of Labor, the Omaha Septemberfest Committee and the radio station.
- Stone Castle of Terror, 30th Avenue and Leavenworth Street. Admission \$2.50 for adults, \$1.75 for children under 12.** Operated by Brad Finkle. Proceeds go to the Omaha Community Playhouse.
- Lite 98 Scream in the Dark, 84th Street south of West Center Road in Mangelsen's parking lot. Admission \$3 for adults, \$2.50 for children.** Operated by Campus Life Youth for Christ.
- Columbus Jaycees Haunted House, Ice rink, Columbus, Neb. Admission \$1.** Operated by the Jaycees with proceeds to the organization.
- Lincoln Jaycees Chamber of Terror, 1818 O St., Lincoln. Admission \$2.50.** Operated by the Jaycees with proceeds to the organization.
- Iral Avenue, Kearney, Neb. Admission \$2.** Proceeds to the Kearney-area United Way.
- Essex Day Care Center House of Horror, East and South Streets, Shenandoah, Iowa. Admission \$1.** Proceeds to the Essex Day Care Center.

elsewhere in the country, the seasonal attractions earn money for private owners.

"Haunted houses have been good business for a good many years," said Bob Martin, vice president of Screampers Inc., a New York company that deals in lifelike monster figures. "If you really know what you're doing, it's very profitable — teen-agers love to be frightened."

Nationwide, he estimated, about 35 percent of haunted houses are run for profit.

In Kansas City, profit-making haunted houses like "The Edge of Hell" and the "Main Street Morgue" have been an annual tradition for a decade or more. But Mary Ellen Yates, one of nine relatives who operate The Edge of Hell, said the family doesn't get rich.

Attendance usually ranges from 20,000 to 25,000 people, though not all pay the full \$4.50 admission. She said payroll and expenses cost \$40,000 to \$60,000 a year, and the remainder works out to "a couple dollars an hour" for family members. She declined to reveal the net earnings.

**'Have to Enjoy It'**  
"It's fair, but it's not a lot," she said. "You have to have your heart in it. You have to enjoy it."

Omaha haunted house workers said that is true. Volunteers usually start

designing the house in the summer and begin construction in early September, working most evenings and all day on weekends to complete a project.

Special flooring, electrical wiring, emergency lighting, sound effects and painting must be done. Monster costumes have to be designed. Flame-retardant chemicals are sprayed throughout the house and checked daily.

Before a house can open, city fire and building inspectors check the construction, wiring, exits and other details and issue a certificate of occupancy.

When a house opens for business, dozens of workers are needed each evening to jump out at customers or control crowds.

"A lot of time goes into it," Moore said. "There's just a lot of effort."

Some organizers also have joined forces with local radio stations to boost attendance. Two of the three stations that lend their names, promotional efforts and technical assistance to haunted houses receive a share of the profits.

**'Scream in the Dark'**  
Steve Albertson, KEFM-Lite 96's promotions director, said his station does not receive money for assisting with "Scream in the Dark."

"We do not take a cut from Campus Life," he said. "We think that 100 per-

cent of the proceeds should go to that charity."

Moore said he is satisfied that his attraction is getting its money's worth for its radio connection.

"You couldn't begin to buy the time they're going to give you," he said.

KOIL Radio general manager Steve Brown said the station's share of the profits covers only part of KOIL's contributions to the project.

"We're not concerned about the price of the publicity," Brown said. "We don't regard this as a revenue source. I think the justification is that it is one way a broadcaster in the community can get involved."

KQKQ general manager Bill Cunningham agreed.

"It's our way of thanking our listeners. I can assure you that we lose money on the deal," he said.

All Finkle said he wants to do at the "Stone Castle of Terror" is to break even. He said he doesn't pay himself for his time and effort, though he does cover all of his out-of-pocket expenses.

That's quite an improvement from past years, Finkle said. When he produced his backyard Halloween event, he said, it cost as much as \$1,000 of his own money.

"I never ever got paid at my haunted yard," he said. "Here, I get all my expenses paid. I just want the money I put into it."

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