



Anatomy Of A Haunted House



PLYMOUTH JAYCEE Jerry Cathey in a haunting mood as he prepares for his Halloween week role. (Observer photo by Bob Woodring)

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By JUDITH BERNE

Observerland is haunted. Seven — count them, seven — haunted houses are available for tours now through Halloween . . . most of them the brain and brawn of local Jaycee groups.

A lights-on opening night tour through the "Spookiest House in Livonia" — masterminded by the Livonia Jaycees — revealed both the detail and scope which make up the anatomy of a haunted house.

"You take 50 weird people and let everyone do his own thing," according to Bob Carey, chairman for this year's venture. This translates into three weeks of hard work, plus hours of prior planning, by both the Livonia Jaycees and the Jaycettes, its women's auxiliary.

"The hardest thing to do is to find a suitable house," Carey revealed. "There just aren't an abundance of old abandoned houses waiting to be haunted."

LIVONIA'S MAYOR, Edward McNamara, was responsible for this year's site. The house and property are owned by the State Highway Department and are scheduled to be leveled for road construction. The mayor obtained permission for the Jaycees to use it.

Each year, the anatomy of the haunted house changes, depending on the edifice being used. This year, those who enter the portals will find eight rooms filled with mechanisms, costumed Jaycees, mannequins and atmosphere designed to haunt for at least the time it takes to creep through.

Initially, a floor plan was drawn up. Next a crew of Jaycees came in to knock down whatever existing walls were not wanted and to put up walls where needed. In one evening all the walls were painted black. The next was devoted to painting appropriate designs and figures on the black background with luminous paint.

Each room is assigned to husband and wife teams, although in practice someone with a particular skill may be used throughout. Specialists — a sound man, electrician and engineer, all members of the Jaycees — help to weave the eerie spell through the use of taped sounds, appropriate lighting (or lack of it) and construction.

THEY'RE HAUNTED!

FARMINGTON	35734 W. 14 Mile 35 cents	6:30 - 10:30 p.m. weekdays 1-10 p.m., Sat., Sun.
LIVONIA	37850 W. Seven Mile (west of Newburgh) 50 cents	7 -10:30 p.m. weekdays 3 -10:30 p.m. Sat., Sun.
PLYMOUTH	Ann Arbor Road (two miles west of Sheldon) 50 cents	7 -10 p.m. tonight 5 -10 p.m. Sat., Sun. 7 -9:30 p.m. Mon.-Wed.
REDFORD	7947 Canton Center Road 15534 Beech Daly 50 cents	7 -10 p.m. tonight -Tues. 6 -10 p.m. tonight -Wed.
SOUTHFIELD*	Northland Center free	10 a.m. -9 p.m. dally Noon -5 p.m. Sunday
*Non-Jaycee		
WESTLAND	906 Schuman 25 cents	7 -10 p.m. Weekdays 3 -10 p.m. Sat., Sun.

Ken and Nancy Freeman were responsible for the opening chamber — the ghost room — in which a system of pulleys allows a small ghost to travel along with you as you walk the length of the room.

The undertaker's room was the creation of a professional — funeral director Bob Craver, his wife Kathy and Bob Aylsworth. A mannequin rises from a genuine casket in most effective style. Throughout the house, the mannequins were donated or loaned by local department store branches, and in one case a Detroit-based mannequin store.

Three members of the women's auxiliary were responsible for the murder bathroom — concept, execution and all. Carol Zagers, Karen Carey and Kathy Craver arranged the static display which depends on lighting and paint for its drama.

A closet was turned into a small torture cell by Morrall Claramunt and a larger torture chamber, complete with guillotine and iron maiden, was the brainchild of Fred Miller and his wife Ruth.

A TRIP TO a local supermarket for an animal heart, brains and liver to be placed in formaldehyde produced effective props for a mad scientist's laboratory. The lab, created by Mark Brunette, Jim Hamby and Jerry Desentz, also boasts an embalming pump "from our friendly funeral director."

Heads for "the head room" — a feature each year — were styrofoam wig dummies, contributed by a local hairdresser and created by residents of Marillac Hall — a home for unwed mothers in Farmington.

The Livonia Jaycettes do a monthly craft project with the girls. "We needed a project for a craft night during September," Karen Carey explained. "So we had a contest to see who could produce the most original head. The girls did a terrific job."

Heads were hung and related on an electrical turning device, through the ingenuity of Gary and Kathy Van Buren.

Bill and Leslie McGuire produced the witches' cave and a rented smoke machine creates the hazy backdrop for a cemetery devised by Ken and Martha Davis, Jim and Ruth Maye and Tom and Bing Hominga. A

"live" grave digger or wolf man — depending on your semantics — is played by a number of Jaycees on a rotating basis, as are other roles throughout the house.

A final maze, with Jaycee goblins jumping out at unexpected intervals, and a flickering strobe light making it difficult to maintain equilibrium are the last obstacles before the security of the October night is reached.

THE LIVONIA JAYCEES had the first Jaycee Haunted House in Michigan, according to Tom Gordon, past president of the group.

"We started it four years ago — Bill McGuire was chairman," he recalled. "Now there are about 80 in Michigan. We've sent our records of how to organize and run it all over the state.

"It has progressed rather well. We've maintained our original 'head room,' but they become more sophisticated every year. We've learned about handling people in masses, and now build the walls stronger following some disastrous experiences."

Gordon noted that the first year the maze was built out of cardboard and they had to stop and repair it every hour or so. "Now we build the walls out of 2 x 4's and they withstand even the kids who get carried away.

"That first year, people were parking for blocks and blocks. Now, we've learned to plan for the parking — in fact that's one of the prime criteria for the house we choose."

In terms of input versus output, Gordon calls the haunted house "our best money maker." This year the price has been raised from 25 to 50 cents — "still a low price for family entertainment," according to Gordon.

All the money we make goes back into the community, he reminded. Last year, from the haunted house and an adjacent children's Halloween house, the Livonia Jaycees reaped nearly \$6,000 for their fall and winter projects.

In addition, the Jaycette auxiliary makes money from the sale of candy apples, potato chips, cider (called spider cider) and donuts.