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Best of Cincinnati for September 11, 2008

Who You Gonna Call?

Regional ghost hunters investigate bumps in the night

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By [CHRISTOPHER TOMLIN](#)

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While Cincinnati thankfully has never been on the receiving end of the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man's supernatural rampage a la *Ghostbusters*, Southern Ohio and its surrounding region is by no means impervious to the unexplained.

"In the '60s, if you were to tell people you were a ghost hunter, you might have been greeted with skepticism," says Patti Starr, founder of Ghost Chasers International in Lexington, Ky. "These days, I think people have their blinders off a little more. I can tell people I'm a ghost hunter and people want to know all about it."

Starr, who says she's had interactions with spirits since she was a young child, hopes her work can help soften the reputation of the ghost as a malevolent entity.

"If the human mind, energy and physics are all a part of the return of a person's spirit, we can learn so much more about ourselves as spiritual and physical beings," she says. "And if nothing else, how wonderful to think that, in some way, we are forever."

Starr's ghost hunting equipment is standard among those in her industry: a video recorder, a voice recorder for EVP (electronic voice phenomena, literally the sounds of spirits), a thermometer to gauge rises and falls in temperature normally associated with the presence of spiritual energy and an electro-magnetic field meter to monitor any electrical disturbances that might signify the presence of a manifestation.

James Bell, co-founder of Cincinnati's Southern Ohio Paranormal Research, uses much the same equipment as Starr, but his perspective toward finding proof of the afterlife is slightly different. First, he doesn't consider himself a "ghost hunter" but rather a paranormal researcher; secondly, Bell's team prides itself in seeking feasible explanations for the thought-to-be unexplainable.

"We're reluctant to call any place haunted," explains Bell, a full-time UC student who says that his research takes up a great deal of his time outside the classroom. "We just see those places as having a lot of things that we can't explain. A lot of times, investigators are out there to find something. They're looking for something. So when something happens, they're quick to call it a ghost.

"I'm not a skeptic, but I have to see it to believe it. We have to try to find every reason why something might be happening."

Bell's research has taken him to Ohio's Mansfield Reformatory and the well-known Moundsville Prison in West Virginia. He's also traveled to the ghost-hunter wonderland, the Waverly Hills Sanatorium in Louisville, which has been the subject of several reality programs and is hailed to be one of the "most haunted places in America."

"The activity going on at Waverly Hills is just off the charts, it really is just awesome," says TM Ghost Hunters' Thea Baldwin of the facility, which remains one of the most popular haunted house attractions in Louisville during Halloween.

Baldwin, based in Danville, Ky., has seen her investigations take her as far as Pennsylvania and Florida and says she remains on the fence between belief and skepticism.

"Everyone says they know someone who has lived in a haunted house or known someone who's lived in one," Baldwin says. "I don't go into a house thinking it's haunted. I just go to see what I

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To Do List

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Exploring Forgotten Places

Urban explorers trespass for history, art and thrills

Swimming with Satori

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Stone Cold Stories

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Altar Boyz pops its way through entertaining clichés

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Shakespeare's Cymbeline is a freewheeling fairytale

Grave Humor

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While Starr, Bell and Baldwin continue to search for evidence of the existence of ghosts, it's a subject that remains controversial. And while their valiant cause might raise goose bumps in many, the fearless hunters continue to trudge into the creepiest of the creepy. ©



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- [Got Faith?](#) Tom Davie wrestles with Catholicism Review By Tamera Lenz Muenta (October 3, 2007)
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