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Villager Journal

Cherokee Village, Arkansas ~ Friday, August 1, 2008


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## Scientific team visits Hardy hotel

Thursday, July 31, 2008

Terrah Baker, Staff Writer



President of ARPAST Larry Flaxman and case manager and researcher Robin Sisson check to see if the eight cameras set out for the night's investigations are positioned correctly.  
Photo/Baker

For many, life after death is predetermined with no scientific explanation, but for a distinct few known as "paranormal investigators," the undiscovered secrets of what lie beyond are what motivates their scientific endeavors.

Arkansas Paranormal and Anomalous Studies Team, or ARPAST, recently visited the Old Hardy Hotel with a goal unlike any paranormal investigation team that has travelled to this area so far. What sets them apart is their defined incentive to not shock skeptics and believers with pictures of ghosts, but to amaze others like themselves with scientific data collected from paranormal investigations.

The Old Hardy Hotel seemed rather eventful the night of the investigation, with apparent flying pennies appearing from nowhere and plates being tapped in a dark and empty room but ARPAST is not quick to call unexplained happenings "paranormal," and they are still reviewing the data collected.

"We had several interesting personal experiences, so, I will definitely be interested to see what we find," ARPAST President Larry Flaxman said.

According to Flaxman, most investigations are uneventful but the ones where evidence is gathered make the entire experience worth the time and effort.

As Flaxman's motto goes, most investigations are, "Long periods of boredom, punctuated by moments of sheer terror."

(Make sure to look for the results of the data plus a first-hand account of the nights events in later papers.)

"The Arkansas Paranormal and Anomalous Studies Team is a science-based research group dedicated to furthering our measured understanding of anomalous and unexplained phenomena via the utilization of state-of-the-art equipment, methodologies and techniques. Our goal is not to 'prove' or 'disprove' the existence of 'spirits' or 'ghosts,'" the ARPAST Web site states as a small portion of their mission.

ARPAST is also a part of a nationwide group known as The Atlantic Paranormal Society, or TAPS, that has a popular network television show called "Ghost Hunters" on Sci-Fi and claim members throughout the world. Like TAPS, it is the goal of ARPAST to gather evidence to present as scientific data but how ARPAST differs is that they don't disclose their findings to the general public.



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"The vast majority of analog and digital data captured would be relatively meaningless to those without the proper interpretive training. As a result, our official policy is to not post the 'results' of our investigations publicly," ARPAST's Web site states.

Founded in 2007 by Flaxman, ARPAST now claims over 150 members who dedicate long nights and weekends to diligently setting up controlled environments in which to search for scientific evidence of the paranormal. The group has become one of the nation's largest and most active paranormal research organizations with every team member trained through field experience and monthly training seminars, Flaxman said.

With trained members, an organized plan and a controlled environment, the team has travelled to over 100 destinations revealing an estimated \$250,000 worth of equipment used to test every aspect of the environment and surroundings.

"We're not ghost hunters, we're looking more at the environmental factors," Flaxman said.

The equipment used by ARPAST has been completely funded from within the group's members and resembles the latest equipment used in paranormal investigation, a field of study that is becoming a fast-growing phenomenon in itself.

Flaxman, whose passion for electronics and science is present in his explanations of the equipment and in his everyday life, explained that there are over 80 different environmental factors the team looks at on every investigation. Analyzing the status of temperature, humidity, and even a particle count of the air in which they are working allows them to decipher an actual paranormal experience from a basic change in environment.

One example of the in-depth equipment used, is the Airborne Particulate Counter which is used to count the amount of particles in the air. Flaxman explained that orbs, or glowing balls of light captured in photographs or video, are commonly mistaken for the paranormal but this machine helps to clarify the impossibility of that assumption. Flaxman recently gave a presentation to an audience of paranormal investigators on why orbs have never actually been proof of the paranormal, based on his research.

Because the field is still largely evolving and scientists aren't sure of even basic paranormal facts, the equipment used by ARPAST is constantly changing and becoming more sophisticated, according to Flaxman. In order to accomplish this, teams like ARPAST have technical consultants who help design custom equipment to suit the specific needs of the group. Two such consultants for ARPAST are a Princeton professor and a former NASA avionics engineer.

"(The engineer) has designed a variety of custom devices based on our requirements. Two of my favorites are a set of four deployable remote-sensing perimeter EMF meters, and an audio DSP enhancement device for EVP's," Flaxman explained.

For those who don't tamper with the paranormal on the weekends, that basically means if there is an out-of-place energy anywhere in the room, these machines will light up to signify it. EVP stands for Electronic Voice Phenomenon and is a noise the human ear can't pick up but electronic machinery can.

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