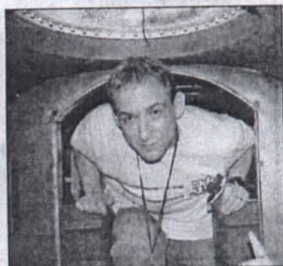


An ARPAST team during their investigation of Cosmic Caverns in Berryville. (left to right, front row) Robin Sisson, Sharon Kovar, Jerry Bailey, John Mimms. (left to right, back row) Tiffany Pressler, Maria Davis, Kevin Faulknor and Hunter Olsen.

ARPAST has the spirit ... *believe it or not*



ARPAST president, Larry Flaxman, climbs out of the cockpit of a WWII bomber at the Arkansas Air Museum at Fayetteville, the site of another investigation.

By Judy Normand
OF THE COMMERCIAL STAFF

The Atlantic Paranormal Society, better known to reality show addicts as TAPS, has opened Pandora's box and its contents are spilling out and catching fire all over the country — even in Arkansas.

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ARPAST, Flaxman said, is the largest paranormal research team in the Southwest and one of the largest in the country with 100 to 150 team members who are divided into several individual groups, which investigate sites on a rotating basis. The members, he said, are literally from all over the world and range in age from 21 to 60. All are employed in the "real" world (Flaxman is in information technology) and most have had some type of personal paranormal experience during their lifetimes.

Flaxman described most of the team's investigations as "hours and hours of boredom punctuated by sheer terror."

Those "terrifying" moments are few and far between, he said, counting only a few he considers really frightening. The vast majority of investigations include "interesting" experiences, not terrifying.

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"We currently have about \$250,000 worth of equipment," Flaxman said, "and it's important

Please see ARPAST on 28

Just the facts

Robin Sisson is a case manager for ARPAST and has been extremely fascinated with the paranormal — "pouring over books and documentaries about the subject" — for as long as she can remember.

After deciding she no longer wanted to rely solely on other people's opinions about the paranormal, she began to look for an organization that would allow her to explore the possibilities.

"I didn't want to find a group that was in it for the thrill-seeking, rollercoaster ride aspect, but a group that is truly looking for



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Larry Flaxman is a senior investigator and president of ARPAST, the Arkansas Paranormal & Anomalous Studies Team. In a recent telephone interview from his Little Rock home, Flaxman first insisted on clarifying one important point: "The television show, 'Ghost Hunters,' is not packaged as a reality show. It's made for entertainment purposes only."

Not that the show or its premise is in any way bogus — these ghost hunters are serious.

"And that's another thing," Flaxman added. "I don't like to use the words 'ghost' or 'haunted.' We were asked to be members of the TAPS family based on our scientific methodology, which means we look for changes in a supposedly 'haunted' environment within a controlled scientific framework. We don't do so much as 'debunk,' as provide scientific data."

Flaxman said he'd been investigating paranormal activity for about 13 years and had decided to form ARPAST in 2007 after being involved with other "ghost hunting" groups who often treated investigations into the supernatural as purely social events.

"So, when TAPS contacted us, we were skeptical. We held off a little, did some research and ultimately decided they were a group we wanted to be associated with. I've since met Jason and Grant (Jason Rhodes and Grant Wilson, founders of the Hawes Island-based

TAPS), as well as other members of the TAPS team. They're all great people and serious about their work. There's a very stringent approval process before they accept a group into the TAPS family."

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Those "terrifying" moments are few and far between, he said, counting only a few he considers really frightening. The vast majority of investigations include "interesting" experiences; not terrifying.

"Lately, we've been investigating more private homes," Flaxman said. "You know, people will call and tell us that things have been disappearing, they hear voices, feel dizzy or nauseous, feel someone is watching them... and after a week or so, we'll go back to the home to present our findings, which is a very similar process to a home inspection report. For the vast majority, there's a prosaic explanation, like breaker boxes, hot water pipes that are not grounded, a high mold count, things like that."

However, he did reveal one episode which "made a believer out of me."

"I would say that the most 'terrifying' incident occurred several years ago when I witnessed a very large guy choked by unseen hands. There were actual finger marks around his neck after the event. This was extremely significant," Flaxman said.

Significant also is the investigator's state of mind and personal belief system, which Flaxman says certainly plays into the equation.

"With that being said, I consider myself an objective skeptic... and I have definitely had some experiences which I cannot explain via traditional science," he said.

Of vital importance to the group's success is

training — on equipment as well as in scientific methodology and research.

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Please see ARPAST on 2B

Just the facts

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After deciding she no longer wanted to rely solely on other people's opinions about the paranormal, she began to look for an organization that would allow her to explore the possibilities.



Sisson

"I didn't want to find a group that was in it for the thrill-seeking, rollercoaster ride aspect, but a group that is truly looking for answers and is willing to exhaust all avenues when looking for them. I may be fascinated with the paranormal and go to 'haunted houses,' but when it comes down to it, I really am a skeptic," Sisson said. "If a door opens, I'm looking for a screwdriver to fix the door, not the 'ghosts' who opened it."

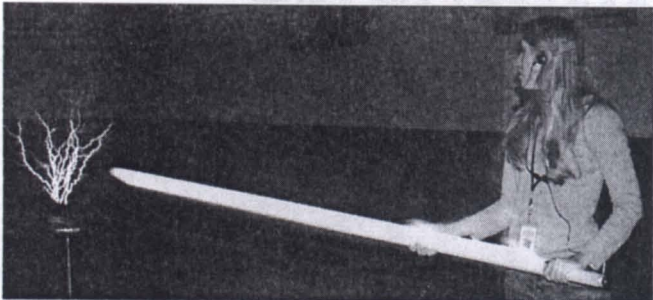
As a case manager, Sisson contacts clients referred by ARPAST president, Larry Flaxman, sets up a date for the investigation and gathers information about the client's "ghostly" concerns. An important aspect of her job is simply conversation.

"Many of these people just need to talk to someone, who won't pass judgment, about what they believe to be going on in their homes," she said, adding that phone and e-mail correspondence is also common.

Once an investigation has been completed and the researchers have reviewed the data, Sisson compiles the information into a manageable format, which is then presented to the homeowner during the reveal.

"Being a case manager has been quite challenging, but it's been really rewarding. With each investigation, I have learned new scientific theory, more on physics and actually learned a lot of history along the way," Sisson said.

ARPAST



ARPAST team member, Tiffany Pressler, tests a 10-foot fluorescent light bulb being charged by a Tesla Coil, part of a long-term experiment being conducted by ARPAST involving energy and paranormal phenomena. A prevailing theory is that "spirits" are able to utilize energy as a means to manifest. The use of the coil provides "them" with a source of ready-made energy.

(Continued from Page 1B)

that everyone knows how to properly utilize and correctly interpret their equipment and data ... the lack of proper understanding and knowledge contributes to bad data. By understanding how to correctly utilize and interpret our equipment, we increase the viability and accuracy of our data, as well as enhance the overall perceived professionalism of our field."

Equipment used by the ARPAST team includes night vision and video cameras, which are used to record every aspect of every investigation. Several of these investigations, Flaxman said, have been attended by a documentary videographer to prepare an upcoming television documentary with ARPAST as the subject.

The organization has been involved in investigations throughout the Southwest and are constantly updating their research databases with information from successful investigations; i.e. from investigations during which "some type of data was captured," Flaxman said.

Most often, he said, the client will contact ARPAST — they're booked, he said, through the end of the year — and people from all over Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Mississippi seek their assistance. TAPS will also contact the team, Flaxman said, when they know of a possible paranormal occurrence in the ARPAST investigation area.

Each client requesting an investigation is required to sign a confidentiality agreement and the team, Flaxman said, always respects the owners wishes regarding that confidentiality.

Uof A rice center at Stuttgart spared by last weekend's tornado

Special to The Commercial
STUTTGART — Dr. Chris Deren, director of the University of Arkansas Rice Research and Extension Center near Stuttgart, was relieved and thankful that the center's headquarters and research buildings were spared a direct hit from last weekend's tornado that ripped through Stuttgart.

"It was remarkable," he said. "We're nine miles east of town, and the storm hit every piece of property along Highway 130 up to the station, then skipped around us, and we're a big target."

The tornado hit a metal and wood storage building containing several pieces of equipment, including planters, threshers and combines.

The compact

down Tarkington Road and hit a large farming operation.

Deren said the station was closed Monday and Tuesday.

"We were closed yesterday so our employees could get their lives back together," he said. Deren, who lives at the station, said many of the station's 65 employees live in Stuttgart and surrounding areas, and many of their homes were damaged.

The station was without power and telephone service, he said, and "that's what we need to function."

"Generally, we do not share our findings with the public as that is outside the scope of our charter. As a 100 percent, science-based organization, our mission is to document, collect and analyze environmental and corroborated data surrounding paranormal phenomena. To this end, we utilize a customized data base which allows us to ascertain and determine environmental relationships and conditions among investigative locations which might be a causative agent for paranormal phenomena," he said.

ARPAST team members meet once a month and average three investigations in a month. To date, they've completed about 100 investigations of both historic locations as well as private residences. All investigations are done free of charge and financing for ARPAST is made possible through individual member support, private donations, group sponsored fund-raising events and/or research grants.

"I believe," Flaxman said, "that after death, it's not the end. Something else occurs; whether it's heaven or hell or just a different plane of existence. We just don't know." He added that, in spite of the growing popularity of "Ghost Hunters" and several other television programs which debate the existence/non-existence of paranormal activity, the activity itself has not actually increased.

"I think it's always been present," he said, "but television and media exposure have definitely served to magnify public awareness."

For detailed information about Arkansas' "Ghost Hunters," visit their Web site at www.arpast.org or forward questions and comments by e-mail to info@arpast.org.



Special to The Commercial

Farmers survey a twisted farm structure on Tarkington Road near the rice center.

Hearing Voices

"I consider our ghosts to be friendly, but we did hear one on the EVP that said, 'Get out!' I told ARPAST to get over there and tell that ghost that we pay the mortgage on that house!"

Anita Langhover is owner of Cosmic Caverns at Berryville and was commenting on an investigation into the paranormal conducted by the Arkansas Paranormal and Anomalous Studies Team. "EVP" refers to Electronic Voice Phenomena, sounds or voices picked up by a device which records these sounds or voices inaudible at the time of the investigation.

Langhover said there were "plenty of ghosts" to go around at the location — in her home and gift shop, in her yard and in the cave itself, which is next to the house. A heavy glass door downstairs in the Langhover home has also provided a few frightening moments.

"I heard a loud scraping sound and thought it was my husband coming in from outside. I called down to him ... but there was no one there," Langhover said. "And that door was locked when I went down to check. But, it had opened by itself. That was the scraping noise I heard."

Langhover said she's "freaked out" as the activity is happening, but that "it's my home and my business and I just have to forget it."

She said she'd had many paranormal experiences in her life and was happy to have ARPAST come in to try to get to the bottom of things.

"They are always very professional and I enjoy their different personalities. I was surprised that many are in law enforcement! They will be back and we'll be glad to see them," Langhover said.

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PROM NIGHT

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