



'Haunted' church or not, sheriff takes action

Polk County - Deputies issue 60 citations over the past month for trespassing

Friday, July 13, 2007

The Oregonian

SALEM -- Strange things happen at the Spring Valley Church, and brave, or perhaps foolish, people from as far away as Portland are traveling to Polk County to see what's going on.

The church, which sits on a hill near farm fields and a graveyard, is rumored to be haunted. According to stories spread by word of mouth and via the Internet, the front door bleeds, pews fly through the air and a man in black riding a bicycle through the grounds disappears into thin air.

Now Sheriff Bob Wolfe is promising to make trespassers vanish -- into the county jail.

Deputies have issued 60 citations over the past month to trespassers drawn to the property by the rumors, Wolfe said. The trespassing has become so rampant that he's decided to detain anyone caught on the church grounds after hours.

"Any juvenile found trespassing will be taken into protective custody and all adults will be transported to the Polk County Jail," Wolfe said. "Maybe some time in jail will get the message across."

Wolfe said it had been years since deputies had issued any trespassing citations at the church. Then in March, the ghost hunters started arriving after dark.

The church's trustees told Wolfe that from March to mid-June, they'd run off about 120 vehicles carrying about 300 people.

"After that, they decided to contact us and have us come out," Wolfe said.

A Web site maintained by the Pacific Paranormal Research Society in Portland lists the church as a reportedly haunted site. But the group performed its own investigation and came up empty. The Web site urges readers not to bother going there.

Of the 60 citations issued, nearly all were for people younger than 25. There have been 25 tickets written for youths 15 to 17, and 32 tickets issued to young adults ages 18 to 24.

The sheriff said he's concerned the trespassing will lead to vandalism at the church if left unchecked. "It doesn't take but a few people to get the idea that they can desecrate church property before it really takes off," he said. "We're trying to nip a bigger problem in the bud."

©2007 The Oregonian