

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

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TV crew wants scary? Seattle has scary

ABC is missing out on great haunts, say ghost hunters

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From dusk to dawn beginning Thursday, ABC Family's "Scariest Places on Earth" will be filming Seattle students -- among others -- conducting a paranormal investigation at Manresa Castle in Port Townsend. But had the network consulted with some local specter seekers first, they would've found plenty of otherworldly sightings in Seattle.

"Seattle has definitely been our main target for investigations. As one of the oldest cities in Washington, there's a lot of history here," said Ross N. Allison, president of AGHOST (Amateur Ghost Hunters of Seattle-Tacoma), which averages two to three investigations a month. ABC has asked the group to help out with recruiting students and contributing their own research of the haunted hotel.

Allison said there's no shortage of local joints where spooky is the norm. In the four years the group has been poking around the paranormal, 100 members split into different teams have found the best vibes in places like the Harvard Exit in Capitol Hill, not only known as SIFF central but also home to restless speakeasy spirits and a spectral entity some think is the lingering presence of Seattle's first and only female mayor, 1920s municipal muckraker Bertha Knight Landes.

The theater also was founded as the clubhouse for the Women's Century Club, an influential organization of intellectual and politically active ladies pivotal in electing Landes.

"Being the first female mayor of Seattle, she probably has a lot to hold onto," Allison said. "She put a lot of energy into that building. In some cases, you'll find an attachment to a person, place or thing."

AGHOST chronicles local investigations at places such as University Heights Center, where its investigators recorded all sorts of inexplicable noises in the former schoolhouse; Timberline Spirits, a bar that during the daytime "can be full of life and color, excitement and extravagance, but after its doors close, its ghosts come out to party"; and Underground Seattle, where the group plans to start its own ghost-focused tours. AGHOST plans to conduct similar tours of the piers and Pike Place Market (Seattle's low-key Hellmouth in terms of supernatural activity).

Allison said expectations of spirited encounters run high.

"When people think of ghosts they think to be scared," he said. "I get it a lot -- 'You're a ghost hunter, you've got to be so brave.' There's really nothing to it. A lot of times people tend to scare themselves more than the spirits trying to scare them. They get themselves worked up, expecting dishes thrown at them or disembodied voices telling them to get out. ... The ghost-hunting part is all about being at the right place at the right time."

While AGHOST focuses on trained investigators sussing out paranormal phenomena, Private Eye Tours gives a narrated history of local haunts year-round.

"When I take local people out, they have a lot of stories to tell," said a Seattle woman who goes by Jake, a guide for the citywide Haunted Happenings tours for four years. "I really do think Seattle has more

ghosts than the average person would realize."

She said a former mortuary at Pike Place Market has levied a kind of curse on subsequent businesses, which never seem to last long in that spot. Another stop on the tour is a former gambling den in Chinatown where 13 people were gunned down in 1983 in an event known as the Wah Mee Massacre.

GHOSTLY GOINGS-ON

- **AGHOST (Amateur Ghost Hunters of Seattle-Tacoma)**

Annual conference with lectures and ghost tours will be held Nov. 11-13 in Port Townsend. For more information: www.ghost.us/index.html

- **Haunted Happenings: The Seattle Ghost Tour** operated by Private Eye Tours www.privateeyetours.com/haunted.htm For more information, or to make reservations, call 206-365-3739 or e-mail jake@privateeyetours.com. Next tour is on Saturday at 6 p.m.; \$25 per person.

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