

SCARY HAPPENINGS IN STRATFORD

Possessed puppets and a forum on UFOs

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"There's something about clown puppets," says John Zaffis, gazing warily at the large cheery-looking pair he keeps in a glass box in his Stratford basement.

"I don't know why, but for some reason they do things," he says. "People who own clown puppets often find that strange things are happening around them."

Zaffis has several other possibly evil clown puppets in that basement, along with a few thousand other inanimate objects that just might be possessed — all part of his museum of the paranormal.

Zaffis said he got many of the items in his collection from people who sought his services in probing unexplained activity happening around them. Once the source of the trouble was located, the owners asked Zaffis — sometimes begged him — to take the items away.

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Contributed photo

Careful: This doll was the subject of one of John Zaffis' interventions. Zaffis removed the item, and curious happenings reportedly ceased in the home.

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Out of this world: Stratford's John Zaffis talks about "The Boys," two puppets he will discuss at a conference on the paranormal next weekend. His house is something of a museum, filled with objects he has collected over the years from owners who thought the items were cursed.

UFOs, possessed puppets at conference

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"They want no part of them," he says, "so they give them to me. I've got more stuff out in my barn that's never been displayed."

So far, the puppets are being good.

Zaffis, a frequent guest on national radio shows and the lecture circuit who has probed the supernatural for almost 35 years, is scheduled to be among the featured speakers at a two-day conference on paranormal phenomena set for June 17 and 18 in Stratford.

The event is sponsored by the Westport-based Smoking Gun Research Agency, an organization that researches and investigates unexplained happenings.

(The group is not associated with the popular Web site, www.thesmokinggun.com).

"This is the seventh time we've held the conference," says Smoking Gun Research Agency founder and director John Nowinski of Westport, "but it's the first time we've stretched it over two days."

The ParaCon conference begins next Friday at the Stratford Library with an 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. schedule of book-signings and presentations by featured speakers, as well as other events.

The June 18 schedule runs 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the Ramada Inn, also in Stratford. In addition to Zaffis, whose topic will be "Exorcisms and Possessed Possessions," speakers will include author Jeff Belanger, a former state resident and founder of



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www.ghostvillage.com, a Web site that hosts online discussions about ghosts and other phenomena.

Nick Roesler, of Madison, Wis., a specialist in UFO investigations, will speak on that topic.

Diane Bajorinas, of Stratford, will present a program on funerary art and preservation of historic graveyards.

Nowinski will act as emcee and host of the conference, and will participate in most of the sessions. He expects attendance at the event to exceed 100 people.

He says the conference is "intended to present the public with experts and evidence that supports the existence of various phenomena often considered fringe topics," such as ghost activity, UFOs and government coverups.

Over coffee at a Stratford restaurant Thursday, Bajorinas, a self-taught paranormal investigator, said she has been a member of Smoking Gun for four years. In that time, she has participated in many investigations of paranormal activity.

She says the paranormal has fascinated her since she was a child.

"I always tended to feel things in inanimate objects," she said. "I'll pick up a rock at the site of an investigation and it will turn hot and cold in succession in my hand."

She described a time when while stopping at a rural bookshop in Massachusetts — she became frightened as she approached the building.

"I felt something very scary when I faced the woods," she says, "but the instant I put my

foot in the door, I knew I should get out of there as fast as possible."

Old cemeteries, with their eerily beautiful gravestones and pithy epitaphs, have long interested her. Once, when the gates to the old cemetery behind the Stratford Library had been locked to prevent vandalism, she climbed the 6-foot fence that surrounded it so she could search for the grave of a woman who was hanged as a witch.

"She's not buried in there," Bajorinas says. "The best anyone can figure, her grave may be under I-95."

For more information on the conference, call 247-0310, or consulting the Smoking Gun Research Agency's Web site: www.sgra-media.com.

Spooky:
Stratford's John Zaffis shows some of the possessed paraphernalia he will be talking about during a conference next weekend in Stratford on paranormal activities.