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## Neighborhoods

### Who you gonna call?

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By Mary Niederberger, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Darrell Sapp

Darrell Sapp/Post-Gazette

Vicci Kenna, a secretary at the Homestead Police department, said she will not go into the basement alone. She said she has heard noises from the boiler room.

Local police are used to getting calls to investigate things that go bump in the night.

But the Homestead police department recently had to call in outside help to investigate what some officers and other employees say are strange noises and goings on at the police station on Ninth Avenue.

On Feb. 23, a crew from the Greater Pittsburgh Paranormal Society set up equipment and spent the night in the station, which is housed in an old building that was once the Homestead Post Office.

Yesterday the department staff was poised to hear a report from the group, whose members told the chief they found some evidence of the paranormal in the building.

But at the last minute, a group member called and said they were still waiting for one more piece of evidence to make their report complete. It's expected to come any day, said Chief Jeff DeSimone. At that point the information will be made public.

However Tonya Boff, founder of the paranormal society, said she and the other seven members of her organization who spent the night at the Homestead police station believe "there is something paranormal in that police department."

She said an unusual "raspy" voice was picked up on audio recordings, and shadows were recorded on a video along with footage of a camera cord coming loose from a wall socket on its own and swinging in front of another camera.

Mrs. Boff, of Green Tree, said she couldn't go into detail about what the raspy voice said but she planned to provide the Homestead police with copies of the videos and audio recordings on April 16. She said the group believes the raspy voice may have come from someone with a throat injury, perhaps someone who hanged himself.

She said her group, which is composed of engineers, psychologists, home remodelers and scientists, have ruled out any logical explanations for their findings.

The paranormal group was summoned to the station by one of the officers, with the chief's approval, after a group of officers and others who work in the building shared stories about weird happenings at the station in recent years.

No one in the police department knows for sure the age of the building, which is owned by Allegheny County. It has housed the police station there since the late 1980s.

The strange happenings have been reported with consistency over the past several years. They include the sounds of doors opening and closing, followed by footsteps across the floor when officers were alone in the building and doors that lock and unlock on their own.

Then there's the basement where workers have gotten the feeling that they are being watched or followed.

And, there's the recent incident in which a hatch on the roof of the building kept coming open even after county maintenance crews sealed it shut.

And, then there was the time a typewriter turned on by itself and the keys started to type while a group was holding a meeting in the conference room.

"Someone said later that we should have put a piece of paper in it to see what the message was that was being typed. But we didn't think that fast," said Denise Kelly, Homestead's program coordinator, and the wife of Baldwin Borough Police Chief Chris Kelly.

But the event that eventually prompted the call to the paranormal investigators occurred several months ago, when an officer pulled into the side lot of the police station and heard a motor running behind the building.

When he investigated, he found a sidewalk sweeper, which had been broken and could be started only with the help of a mechanic, running on its own with no key in the ignition.

In addition, it was a snowy day and there were no tracks in the snow around the machine, tracks that seemingly would have been left behind if someone started it, the chief said.

The office staff said outside workers who come to do maintenance work in the building are sometimes spooked. A young man who was painting the basement "said he heard something and got a horrible feeling," Mrs. Kelly said. "When he came up his eyes were huge and he was in a panic."

Secretary Vicci Kenna said a young meter reader thought that he saw something ghostlike in the basement when he shined his flashlight through a grate.

Yesterday, a Post-Gazette reporter and photographer toured the basement along with police Officer Jeff Luptak and Mayor Betty Esper. But no spirits presented themselves.

Mrs. Esper said she has experienced no strange happenings at the building.

But Officer Luptak said he often hears doors opening and closing when he is alone in the building. "I expect to see another officer show up, but no one ever comes," he said.

Like the mayor, Chief DeSimone said he's never experienced anything unusual in the building and was highly skeptical of the initial stories. But, he said, when he heard from at least half of his current 13 active officers and several members of the office staff, he said he agreed to have the situation investigated.

Even while doing his own investigation, the chief said he found consistencies and similarities in the stories of his staff.

"I didn't want to jump into this right away because I didn't want people to think we were crazy," he said.

The chief also said that in the area upstairs behind a window, where the investigators' video camera appeared to record some shadows, one of his officers reported always feeling "watched" by something behind that window.

The chief said he is curious to see exactly what evidence the paranormal group has gathered. In particular, he said he'll be interested in what voices were found on recordings. He said he is a big fan of the show "Ghost Hunters" on the Sci Fi Channel and has seen examples of such recordings called "electronic voice phenomenon."

Even if the police staff members find the building is haunted, they won't have to deal with it for much longer. Homestead is making plans to build a new municipal center that will include a new police station. The building could be completed by the end of the year.

"Hey, if there are spirits here, they are welcome to come to the new building," the chief joked. "They aren't hurting anyone."

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