October 31, 2000

October 31, 2010

In The Dark For

Ten Years

* Goatman Hollow * Seaside Event * Scarehouse Pt 1 *
* Crystal Beach Laff in the Dark *
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ON THE COVER

Thanks to our loyal DAFE members we are celebrating our tenth anniversary!

Barrel O’ Fun is a quarterly publication of the
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E V E N T P L A N N E R S
A S S O C I A T I O N
M E M B E R

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Barrel O’ Fun
Fall 2010
Anaheim, CA – Disney California Adventure is slated to create Ariel’s Undersea Adventure, The Little Mermaid darkride, for 2011. Reportedly inspired by the former Ocean Park’s Dragon Gorge scenic railway, the $100-million ride is intended to reflect a 1920s era seaside park attraction, featuring an arch with relief carvings of King Triton and mermaids.

Pastel-colored, clam-shell-shaped Omnimover vehicles similar to the Haunted Mansion’s “Doom Buggies” take riders through the following scenes:

- Scene 1 — The loading area features a panoramic mural with all the main movie characters and a seaside castle.
- Scene 2 — Audio-animatronic versions of Sebastian the crab and Scuttle the seagull set up the ride’s back story.
- Scene 3 — A blast of cold air and a visual illusion make riders feel as if they are submerging underwater as the clam shell vehicle descends into the heart of the darkride.
- Scene 4 — Riders pass through Ariel’s treasure-lined mermaid grotto with sidekicks Sebastian and Flounder as the song “Part of Your World” plays.
- Scene 5 — Sebastian conducts an audio-animatronic orchestra of sea creatures in the ride’s main showroom to the tune of “Under the Sea.”
- Scene 6 — In Ursula’s lair, riders pass under menacing rock work as henchmen eels Flotsam and Jetsam lurk nearby during the villainous sea witch’s big diva musical number “Poor Unfortunate Souls.”
- Scene 7 — The clam shell vehicle appears to ascend from the ocean depths.
- Scene 8 — Ariel and Prince Eric kiss on a rowboat to the strains of “Kiss the Girl” as geysers spout water.
- Scene 9 — The spell-breaking kiss drives Ursula mad as “Love’s First Kiss” plays amid gathering storm clouds.
- Scene 10 — The “Happily Ever After” finale scene has been kept a closely guarded secret by Walt Disney Imagineers.
- Scene 11 — Riders unload as Ariel and Eric stand atop the castle, King Triton salutes them from the water and Sebastian waves goodbye.

In 2013, a similar version of The Little Mermaid darkride is scheduled to open in the retooled Fantasyland section of the Magic Kingdom in Orlando.

Arlington, TX – Amusement Today recently released the winners of its 2010 Golden Ticket awards. Of particular interests to DAFE members are:

**BEST FUNHOUSE/WALK-THROUGH ATTRACTION**
1- Noah’s Ark, Kennywood
2- Frankiestein’s Castle, Indiana Beach
3- Ghost Ship, Morey’s Piers
4- Hotel Gasten, Liseberg
5- Lustiga Huset, Gröna Lund

**BEST DARKRIDE**
1- Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man, Universal’s Islands of Adventure
2- Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, Disney’s Hollywood Studios
3- Haunted Mansion, Knobels Amusement Resort
4- Harry Potter and The Forbidden Journey, Universal’s Islands of Adventure
5- Curse of DarKastle, Busch Gardens Williamsburg (tie)
5- Indiana Jones Adventure – Temple of the Forbidden Eye, Disneyland

**BEST HALLOWEEN EVENT**
1- Universal Orlando Resort, Orlando, FL
2- Knott’s Berry Farm, Buena Park, CA
3- Knobels Amusement Resort, Elysburg, PA
4- Kennywood, West Mifflin, PA
5- Kings Island, Kings Mills, OH

Orlando, FL – Could Disney be considering Haunted Mansion and Disney Princess themed resort rooms? Rumor has it that Disney appears to be considering the possibility of adding more themed rooms to the moderate resort room line-up. These new room proposals add the option of a “Royal Room”, drawing inspiration from the Disney Princess stories, and a Haunted Mansion room. A Disney fan chat site was quoted as saying:

“Come spend the night with a few of the happy haunts who play in an enchanted bedroom inspired by the Haunted Mansion. Rest atop the floating Doom Buggy beds with a couple of friendly spooks and watch glow-in-the-dark, cartoon-like footsteps mysteriously appear as the evening sets in. A sliding bookcase creates a hidden passage to the bathroom and is the perfect hiding place for a hitchhiking ghost. Oversized furnishings with curvy lines and bright colors add to the whimsy in the room. Guests will delight in finding the hidden special effects that play up the merriness rather than scary, room ambiance.”

Orlando, FL – There is more to paralyzing fear than a scream in the darkness or a cool breath on the back of the neck…or the grip of the undead.

Fear that truly consumes us comes from deep inside our souls, stirred by something we don’t always understand and rarely have the chance to confront…until now.

Halloween Horror Nights XX is about Fear himself. He is the Master of everything Halloween Horror Nights has ever been and will become. His weapons: Chaos, Death, Sacrifice, Mythos, Vengeance. His pawns: a clown, a storyteller, a caretaker, a director, an usher…and you.

For 24 nights beginning September 24 and running through October 31, Halloween Horror Nights at Universal Orlando Resort will reveal Fear as he has never been seen or experienced before. Fear
and what he has created have horrified people for 19 years. And
this year, he will be more real than ever.
“Everything we have done for the past 19 years, everything
we have learned, leads to this moment,” said Jim Timon, senior
vice president of entertainment for Universal Orlando Resort.
“This year’s Halloween Horror Nights is not about the past. It
is about the future.”
Halloween Horror Nights XX is not an anniversary event.
There may be glimpses of the familiar, but those glimpses may
not look the same as guests remember. And the familiar will
quickly give way to the new.
This year, Halloween Horror Nights will feature eight all-new
haunted houses, new scarezones and live shows. And everything
Fear touches will never be the same.
Halloween Horror Nights runs September 24-25, September
30, October 1-3, 7-10, 14-17, 20-24 and 27-31. For tickets and
event information, visit www.HalloweenHorrorNights.com. Due
to the event’s popularity, tickets for weekend nights are expected
to sell out and should be purchased well in advance.
Daily updates and exclusive details on Universal Orlando’s
Halloween Horror Nights are also available on the event’s official
Facebook fan page: www.facebook.com/halloweenhorrornightsorlando or search on Facebook for “Universal’s Halloween
Horror Nights – Orlando OFFICIAL.”

Jacksonville, FL – A menagerie of animatronic “wild” animals
and special effects from Sally Corporation are adding elements
of surprise and excitement to Treasure Hunters, the popular safari
ride adventure in the Ancient Egypt zone at Universal Studios
Singapore. Aboard vehicles which replicate old-time Jeeps, visi-
tors travel through barren desert landscapes and ancient ruins
in search of world-famous archaeologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler
and his support team (who have been reported missing), brav-
ing threats by wild creatures and other dangers along the way.
Designed by Mike Fish, art director, and Michael DoQui, show
producer and co-art director, of Universal Creative and Resorts
World Sentosa, Treasure Hunters is an adventure for all ages.

Setting out on their quest, explorers are faced with roaring,
grunting hippos that rise up, ears twitching, from the bottom
of a lake filled with greenish-looking water. On the left, two
vultures are protecting their find of human bones: the larger
vulture screeches and lunges at the passing Jeeps. Ahead, several
giant cobras sway and hiss atop rocky ledges on each side of
the ride path, striking at the intruders, and a magnificent cheetah
snarls and growls as he prepares to leap onto a passing vehicle.
Crocodiles watch greedily from below a rotting wooden bridge
as Jeeps rumble overhead and barely escape as timbers crack
and a section of the bridge collapses...falling toward the wait-
ing crocodiles.
Along the way, visitors discover ancient archaeological ruins
with an ancient burial chamber and an area littered with artifacts
and crates, plus a magnificent, almost eight-foot tall, sarcopha-
gus. As the explorers approach, the Sally-built sarcophagus opens
and the skeletal hand of a mummy appears just as smoke shoots
from the eyes of the carved image on the sarcophagus, and a
voice delivers a curse on those who are disturbing his peace. In
the final scenes, skeletal remains indicate that the missing archae-
ologists did not escape the curse. And then, suddenly, thousands
of scarabs are crawling down walls and over broken columns...toward
the visitors who must escape the onslaught.
Since Treasure Hunters is an open-air attraction, the anima-
tronic animals and props from Sally Corporation are built to
withstand extreme heat, and other harsh conditions, according to
Sally CEO John Wood. “We have had a considerable amount of
experience building animatronics for long-term use in extremes
of weather and for installation in water, so the materials and tech-
niques we used for the Universal Studios ride at Resorts World
Sentosa have been well tested,” says Wood. “It’s a terrific ride
and we are really pleased to have played a part in the success of
this amazing new theme park.”
The Jeep ride cars from Chance Morgan have faux canvas
tops to shelter riders from the tropical sun as well as Singapore’s
frequent rains...and to protect them from all those “wild” animals
lying in wait for unsuspecting adventurers.
Jacksonville, FL – In 2010, Themed Attraction Design (TAD) has worked on three different walk-through haunted attractions that utilize ChromaDepth® 3D technology to visually entertain visitors. 3D Mystery Manor, Cassandra’s Labyrinth of Terror 3D and Bedlam 3D were the three attractions that benefited from TAD’s expertise and creativity. TAD utilized many new cutting-edge advancements to make these attractions very unique experiences.

ChromaDepth® 3D works by creating the illusion of depth from the colors of the spectrum. While wearing ChromaDepth® 3D glasses hot colors appear to come forward, while cooler colors appear to recede. When UV reactive colors are used under blacklight, the 3D illusion is amplified even more.

3D Mystery Manor was created for the IX Indoor Amusement Park in Cleveland, Ohio. This attraction was designed by TAD to be a kid-friendly funhouse during the four week run of the Indoor Amusement Park, and then easily converts to a kid-friendly haunted attraction for the Trick or Treat Street Halloween event at the IX Center. TAD owner Dan Faupel said, “When developing Mystery Manor we took several classic funhouse gags and gave them a modern twist using 3D concepts and new technology not available before. We went to great lengths to insure that it would be suitable for kids ages 3 to 9, but would also be entertaining enough for the whole family.” The IX Center enjoyed greater than projected attendance for the 3D funhouse during the Indoor Amusement Park’s 2010 season.

Cassandra’s Labyrinth of Terror 3D is an adult-oriented haunted attraction created for Thrillvania Thrill Park near Dallas, Texas. High-energy scares, bizarre illusions and unique lighting effects combine to make this walk-through attraction unlike any other. “At the client’s request, we came up with many concepts that had never been done in a 3D haunted attraction before. Some of these things included video effects, and specially developed sound and lighting effects. With the incredible popularity of 3D movies right now, 3D walk-through attractions should be a big hit,” stated Faupel. At the recent soft opening of the attraction, visitors gave the haunt rave reviews. A one hour TV show was filmed, documenting construction of the attraction, that will air in October on the DIY Network.

After the success of Cassandra’s, Bedlam 3D was created for Indy Screampark near Indianapolis, Indiana. Bedlam features the same look and feel of Cassandra’s, at a smaller size and budget. Faupel said, “We didn’t have the same budget to work with at Indy, so we took a lot of the same scenic pieces and technology that were effective at Cassandra’s and reproduced them in a more inexpensive manner, which is always easier to do the second time around.”

Services performed by TAD for these attractions included: Concept/theming design and illustrations, project management, specifications and schematics, vendor management and installation management. More information on TAD’s services is available at www.ThemedAttractionDesign.com.

Themed Attraction Design is the brainchild of Dan Faupel. Dan has worked with over a hundred haunted attractions, amusement parks and other themed attractions during his 20 year career. He is the previous Senior Designer of Sally Corporation, and previous Vice President/Creative Director of Creative Visions. TAD is a proud member of DAFE (the Darkride and Funhouse Enthusiasts), IAAPA (International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions), TEA (Themed Entertainment Association) and IAHA (International Association of Haunted Attractions).

San Francisco, CA – Ripley’s Believe It or Not! San Francisco Odditorium, a popular Fisherman’s Wharf attraction since 1967, has reopened after undergoing a mega-makeover that took several months and $5 million dollars to complete.

Additions include Ripley’s Marvelous Mirror Maze & Candy and Toy Factory and hundreds of new exhibits.

“If you have visited us in the past, as millions have since we first opened, you certainly won’t recognize us now,” said Ian Ilias, Ripley’s general manager. “Not only do we have a new, fresh and colorful look and new exhibits, but we also have expanded the space and now offer a mirror maze with hundreds of mirrors and a candy and toy factory that has an amazing choice of bulk candies and unique toys.”

With more than 70 new interactive and hands-on exhibits, it’s the most interactive Believe It or Not! Odditorium in the world! It is home to more than 300 exhibits, 80% of which are new, in 18 themed galleries, with a new emphasis on the Bay Area.
Highlights include:

- The car that the late Buck Helm was in when it was crushed during the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989. Helm spent 89 hours in the vehicle under tons of rubble. The car was donated to Ripley’s by the Helm family and it has never been on display in the Bay Area, having spent the last 20 years in Los Angeles.

- The world’s smallest Golden Gate Bridge replica – made from a single toothpick.

- The restraint chair from the former gas chamber on San Quentin’s death row.

- Joe DiMaggio war memorabilia.

- “Goliath,” the world’s largest sea lion, acquired from P.T. Barnum.

- A model of the Space Shuttle Challenger made from 600,000 matchsticks.

- Celebrity portraits made entirely of candy, including a lovely, licorice-laden Lady Gaga and Michael Jackson made from gum drops.

- A wedding dress made from toilet paper.

- A ball of human hair weighing 167 pounds.

*Ripley's Marvelous Mirror Maze* is where “mirror, mirror on the wall” goes to a whole new level, with more than 200 mirrors spread across nearly 2,000 square feet of seemingly dead end paths. Special lighting and sound effects make this a fun and unique family activity!

*Ripley's Candy & Toy Factory* is a colorful, fun and tasty addition to the Believe It or Not! and the Marvelous Mirror Maze! A huge and splendidferous variety of candies of all kinds – from old fashioned root beer barrels to the most current confections are available as are unique and fun toys.

*Ripley's Believe It or Not! San Francisco Odditorium* is located at 175 Jefferson Street in the heart of Fisherman’s Wharf. The Odditorium opens daily at 9 a.m. and closes at 11 p.m. Sunday through Thursday; and Midnight on Friday and Saturday.

For ticket information and hours please visit [http://sanfrancisco.ripleys.com/](http://sanfrancisco.ripleys.com/).

**Santa Cruz, CA** – The Haunted Castle, a ride that debuted at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk in June, was damaged by a teenager during the summer causing the new attraction to briefly close for repairs. Police said the 16-year-old boy was on the ride Saturday night when he allegedly tugged on a prop – a cloth-covered table – dragging it onto the tracks. The next car struck the table, then was rear-ended by a third car. No one was injured, but the collisions bent the tracks and cut some electrical cables.

Security cameras and Boardwalk security aided local police in identifying the teen as a suspect and in arresting him. He was booked into Juvenile Hall on suspicion of vandalism causing more than $5,000 damage, according to police.

The ride was back in operation in just a few days.

**Blackpool, UK** – Pleasure Beach’s newest attraction, the *Carnesky Ghost Train*, was opened recently by Paloma Faith who performed some of her hit songs during the opening. The *Ghost Train* is based near the Pleasure Beach and opposite the South Pier in Blackpool and is inhabited by live performers, creepy animatronics, spectacular magic illusions, eerie moving sets, and a dazzling show of lights. The cost of the ride is £2 for children and £3.50 for adults with a family ticket of £10 for 2 adults and 2 children and the ride last 10 minutes.

**CORRECTION** — The last issue incorrectly identified two of Pam Kanai’s photographs to B. Derek Shaw. Sorry Pam!

**Raising spirits** – Fans of darkrides are anticipating the relocation and reincarnation of the *Golden Nugget* at Knoebels Amusement Resort.

Reprinted courtesy of the Patriot-News
By Liam Migdail-Smith 7-10-2010

The ghosts of past spook rides, the likes of *Dante’s Inferno* at the former Williams Grove Park in Monroe Twp., *Le Cachot* at Ken-nywood near Pittsburgh, and *Castle Dracula* and *Brigantine Castle* in Wildwood, N.J. {Actually, Brigantine, NJ-Ed.}, still haunt the amusement park world.

Many of these “darkrides,” known for their pop-out ghouls, light-up skulls and falling beams that haunt thrill seekers as they walk or ride through dark hallways, have closed – or in the case of *Castle Dracula* and *Brigantine Castle*, were destroyed by fire. But an hour north of Harrisburg, workers at Knoebels Amusement Resort are laying track for a new darkride.

The three-story, wooden structure they’re working on – what looks like a hollowed-out box full of ramps and walls, turns and corners – started to develop in a back section of the Northumberland County park in April.

But the pieces of track that are scattered about the construction site and are being put in place are much older than the newly built structure. In fact, they’ve been around since 1960 as part of a one-of-a-kind roller coaster and darkride hybrid, the *Golden Nugget*. Knoebels’ new ride, the *Black Diamond*, which is set to open for the 2011 season, will be a new ride using the classic ride’s track.

And for classic roller coaster and darkride fans, that’s why this project is one of the most exciting things to come around in a while.

“I’ve been hoping for years that they would save the *Golden Nugget*,” said Joel Styer of Reading, a long-time coaster and dark-ride fan.

Why the excitement? The *Golden Nugget* was unique in how it married darkride-style stunts and scenery with a classic roller coaster track. Both ride styles have been falling by the wayside as many parks focus on more intense steel coasters and thrill rides. But they have strong fan followings, which often overlap.
“In my mind, those are the two most important rides in any park,” said B. Derek Shaw, a coaster historian from York. “The roller coaster for the thrills and the darkride for the chills.”

The Golden Nugget was the best of both worlds. It had the only steel track built by the Philadelphia Toboggan Co., the world’s oldest roller coaster builder. Philadelphia Toboggan is responsible for most American wooden coasters, including local favorites such as the Comet at Hersheypark, Kingdom Coaster at Dutch Wonderland, Thunderhawk at Dorney Park, and Twister and Phoenix at Knoebels. The Golden Nugget was the only steel track and the only darkride that Philadelphia Toboggan built.

The ride’s scenery and stunts, which Styer said reminded him of the desert from Roadrunner cartoons, were the work of legendary darkride designer Bill Tracy. All but nine of Tracy’s more than 75 attractions are gone. Several were at Hersheypark and Dorney Park.

The Golden Nugget opened in summer 1960 at what was then called Hunt’s Pier in Wildwood, N.J. But after the pier went through some ownership changes, it closed, along with the Golden Nugget, in 1998. Morey’s Piers, a neighboring amusement park, bought the pier and used it for storage. The Golden Nugget sat unused for nearly 10 years.

Now it’s getting new life in central Pennsylvania. Knoebels bought the Golden Nugget’s track, trains and mechanics from Morey’s.

The Black Diamond will have the same track as the Golden Nugget, which was a favorite of the park’s president, Dick Knoebels. But the scenery and stunts will be new and will have a coal mining theme, said Joe Muscato of Knoebels. Two designers are working on plans for the track. The park will choose one of them. Even though Tracy’s original scenery and stunts won’t be part of the Black Diamond, the new additions will be designed in his style to preserve the classic feel, Muscato said.

“We don’t necessarily want super-high-tech stunts going on,” he said. “We want falling barrels and maybe falling timbers.”

And that’s important, said Rick Davis, the president of Darkride and Funhouse Enthusiasts, because classic darkrides are few and far between. In the end, in addition to being a semirevival of a classic, the Black Diamond will be a new darkride but in the classic style.

Fans weren’t surprised that this project would come from Knoebels.

The park has a track record when it comes to preserving old rides and building new ones. It bought and moved an old wooden coaster from San Antonio, Texas and rebuilt it as the Phoenix. That’s usually among the world’s top wooden roller coasters in rankings.

It designed and built its Twister wooden coaster in house. The park’s darkride, the Haunted Mansion, also built and designed in house, has come in No. 1 by a landslide on the Darkride and Funhouse Enthusiasts’ poll of favorite darkrides for the last five years, Davis said.

The park has been recognized for its efforts. In Amusement Today’s 2009 Golden Ticket Awards, it came in second for Best Park. That’s behind Cedar Point, Ohio, and before Disneyland in California.

For some fans, like Styer, Knoebels’ involvement is one of the most exciting parts of the project. He’s happy the park’s giving new life to the classic ride, but he’s even more excited to see how Knoebels will make it its own, he said. The Golden Nugget was one-of-a-kind with its merger of a roller coaster and a darkride. The Black Diamond will also likely do things that have never been done, he said.

“I’m going to miss part of the Golden Nugget,” he said. But “I am excited to see how they take the theme from Black Diamond and use the coal mining theme.”
The Goatman Hollow Dark Experience

Q: What are you doing here? A: Looking for the Goatman!

By Doug Smith

On October 2, 2009, a quintet of us (Nancy Stillwagon, Bill Galvin, Derek Shaw, Tom Bergman, and I) was privileged to attend the technical walk-through (aka pre-dress rehearsal) of this year’s Goatman Hollow (GHM) production in Riverdale, Maryland. (It should be noted that GHM has had the Riverdale Fire Department as a fund-raising beneficiary/partner for the last several years.)

A brief “history” from the Web site: the “legend” is that there have been for decades in Prince George’s County reports of a creature responsible for dismembered animals, damaged vehicles, and even murders. Also part of the “legend” is a deranged former government scientist who confessed to creating the creature, a ‘goatman’, by combining goat DNA with that of his one time assistant. The madman is also obsessed with bringing back to life his dearly-departed wife. The “legend” picks up steam in 2002, which also happened to coincide with the commencement of the GHM production. Details to the “legend” have been added each year since; with enough strange phenomena, conspiracies, and cover ups to fill a season of the X Files.

Our experience began with shadowing the technical director, Mike Gemeny, who conducted the walkthrough. He was showing “Agent #2” the operations of the Time Machine elevator, all the controls, and the contingencies if the power should go off or the doors should open unexpectedly. Mike also showed us that during the rehearsals it was a good idea to place one’s foot at an angle at strategic places while walking to limit any damage that might occur if one of those hidden doors opened up when least expected. There are only a couple of crossover areas where this could happen; so the risk is not all that great.

The walkthrough continued with Mike explaining what would happen and the actors going through their paces and some of the dialogue. The actors were in and out of character during the walkthrough. Yolanda Gureckas, as “Agent York” in the attic, volunteered that she has been with the production almost from the beginning. Three of the cannibal/zombie group, Mia, Rachel, and Britney, echoed that theme. Many people with the production have been there multiple years. The consensus is that GHM is a large family and the production is a labor of love.

Jay Wright is one of the VIPs associated with the GHM production; and is who coordinated our visit. His wife, Jenny, is in charge of makeup overall. There are several different rooms dedicated to this; including a separate one for any actor needing to apply latex [the prime example is the mad scientist himself, “Dr. Fletcher” (Steve Wilhite.)] This separate room is precautionary for anyone who might be allergic to latex.

We also were able to examine the power control room. It was in a small area and didn’t seem to be overly extensive. Of course the network could be more elaborate than it looks. In a production like this, power, lighting, timing and sound effects are crucial to success. Also, it’s not like the production itself is in a small area. Mike told us that the old John C. Dorsey building, the GHM production home, has a total space of about 10,000 square feet. The production uses about 75% of that.

Even with that size, most of the rooms are cozy. Thus lighting is very important with that many people in limited space. This is most crucial with the dream doll sequence – several of the “dolls” are in black costumes.

Another item about layout: this building is advantageous for this kind of production as it has a corridor around the entire perimeter inside. This allows actors (or anyone) to come and go unseen; plus adds untold value for any emergency evacuation.

One last item about the walkthrough and being in character: the patriarch of the cannibal clan, Pa Zugg, probably got a little TOO friendly with Nancy.

Now, about that time machine elevator which is the most unique part of GHM: this box, about the size of an office building elevator, shakes, rattles, rolls, bounces around and has a soundtrack like a Twilight Zone pinball machine for almost two and a half minutes. The Maryland state agency that performs inspections on real elevators actually came and examined this one, too.

After the technical walkthrough it was time to execute (is that a bad verb here?) the production as close to a dress rehearsal as possible. It was desirable to stage multiple iterations for the cast to practice; so we actually went through twice, taking well more than a half hour each time. The repetitions paid off. The second iteration was sharper and smoother than the first.

The plot line for the tour in the beginning is rather straightforward. But it gets more cartoonish as it progresses. And the ending? Normally I would not reveal such. The truth is, even just before the real dress rehearsal, there was no set ending. The climax involves the audience “agents” encountering Dr. Fletcher, who is going to try again to resurrect his beloved dead wife. Predictably, something goes wrong which will put the “agents” in danger. Mike told us that the last part of the production remains largely unscripted; so the ending can vary depending on the audience participation. We saw no goatman. Sufice to say any ending would not involve a non-character appearing to tell us where to exit.

P.S. We did make a fun ending of our own with Nancy subbing for Mrs. Fletcher and Bill becoming a willing victim.

There are about 25 actors in this year’s production. Each performs rotating roles (the one notable exception: Steve Wilhite IS Dr. Fletcher. Period). Preparation begins in the summer. Activities include set construction, prop gathering, and acting seminars. Jenny Wright takes the lead for the latter.

As with any amateur production, there is a core of people that perform multiple tasks. A look at the GHM Web site shows this list of cast and crew, past and present. That there are a number of people involved in so many different things is one indication of the sheer dedication to make this a quality production.

Summary: this production is simply top notch in just about every aspect. GHM is light-years ahead of the standard walkthrough with souls in masks jumping out of the dark. One of the comments on the GHM Web site, from a survivor, described very aptly: it is very much like being dropped into a horror movie (and not Plan 9 from Outer Space, either). Plusses on the checklist even though we experienced a not-fully realized production: cast, sets, props, scenery, costuming, lighting, and sound effects. And singular moments to remember: the elevator ride is just a trip. During the cannibal family scene, the one daughter just kept staring at me, brandishing her fork. Should I have been flattered…or freaked?

A final grade would have to depend on going through again and seeing how that last unwritten chapter would play out. My inkling is there is a very good chance it would be close to an A+. It’s a little frustrating not being able to compare GHM to dark entities of the past that were commercial (e.g. Brigantine Castle, Haunted Mansion @ Long Branch, Skull Kingdom). These I did not experience. Kudos to the webmistress also (Carollynn Hammersmith). The site is very well done; especially that music that settles around you creepily. It is in the style of Tubular Bells at about half the tempo. From there it slows down even more towards the end.

Final thought: a Halloween production would almost just have to be good without a single chainsaw within sight, or earshot. Just enjoy the silence…or maybe not. http://www.goatmanhollow.com/
This year marked the 4th “Seaside Screams” event at Casino Pier. Usually we gather about noon but this year was different. We met a little earlier because ACE paired up with DAFE for a walk-back tour of Stillwalk Manor. After registering and getting our wristbands we were broken up into two groups. My husband and I were part of the second group since the first group had already started their tour by the time we got there.

That morning it was hot and disgustingly muggy so we went with some friends to wait in the Carousel Building since it was a bit cooler in there. Assistant Regional Rep. Bret Ulozas said he’d come get us when it was our turn. While hanging out in the Carousel Building we were able to admire the cake that had been made for the 100th Birthday of the Carousel. It had been made for a celebration back in June so it was on display in a fridge in the front of the building. The cake had been made by a famous bakery in Hoboken, NJ, some of us know as Carlo’s Bakery from TLC’s Cake Boss. They did a pretty good job! The horses were very realistic and had intricate details. The canopy on top was a bright red and yellow stripe with the Casino Pier logo on it, all made out of fondant. We weren’t in there for long before Bret arrived to let us know our time had come and we were to make our way to the pier. Once there, we were welcomed by Josh Karu – Operations Manager for Casino Pier. He gave us a tour and talked about some of the rides such as the Sky Scraper, The Enterprise, Wild Mouse, Tilt-a-Whirl and the Log Flume. After Josh talked about the rides we were finally at the entrance to Stillwalk Manor. It was originally called Nightmare Manor and stood where the Centrifuge presently stands. The whole building had been moved over and given a new façade and cars several years ago. The original cars ran in the opposite direction of the cars today. Before entering, Josh had a few rules for us. First, mainly to ensure our safety, we were to walk on the right side of the track. Secondly, to take as many pictures as we’d like, take our time and to have fun and enjoy ourselves. Josh let us walk through at our own pace taking as many pictures as we liked. Before going in we checked out the cars. They have one face on the front and three on the back. Of the faces on the back, there is one in the center and one on each side that shares an eye from the center face. It’s pretty cool when you see it in person.
guy in a red cape hanging from the ceiling in a doorway. I don’t remember seeing him before. Towards the end, out of the corner of my eye, I spotted a guy standing near a corner with a big body and a tiny head. It was kinda freaky. The walk-through was over when we met up with a very large creature on the wall just before the exit to the haunted house. Then it was back out into the heat we went. We were both grateful to be given the opportunity to walk through with the lights on. After the tour we had some time to ourselves before we had to meet everyone at the Carousel.

At 1PM we gathered at the Carousel Building for a little celebration. There were two cakes: one for the carousel and one for Assistant Regional Rep. Bret, who was celebrating his 40th birthday that week. Afterward we attempted to marathon the Carousel for 100 minutes. I think at the end there were three people that had actually ridden the whole time. I like this carousel because it is unique in that all the horses have different names painted on them. I rode a few times and then decided to ride a chariot since I never had before. Think I’ll stick to the horses from now on; the chariot made me a little dizzy.

We were all given wristbands that were good until 6PM; however, a storm rolled in around 4. We had just gotten to Stillwalk Manor for a ride when it started to drizzle. By the time we were next in line to go in, it had turned into a downpour. The ride operator actually asked us if we wanted to go in or just wait till it let up a bit. We said we’d wait. There is no cover at the entrance or exit so we would’ve gotten soaked! As we waited the storm out, it only got worse. It looked like a monsoon and it was a cold rain! Not good!! The few of us that were there got as close to the building as possible, but we still got wet by the windswept rain. Lightning was striking not too far from where we were standing. No way were we going anywhere! Eventually we decided to brave the storm and make a run for it once the lightning stopped. Luckily the storm didn’t last too long and by 6PM the park reopened and we found out that our wristbands would be honored for the rest of the night! We ended up staying till they shut the rides down about midnight and had a great day at the shore.
The next three months are crucial for the haunters and to interview Scott Simmons, director of Scarehouse in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and to go behind the scenes.

The next three months are crucial for the haunters and Scarehouse is no exception. Scarehouse consists of three haunts for the price of one: Rampage, Delerium 3D, and (new for 2010) The Forsaken. The actual maze is one cleverly designed continuous maze, with “spacer” points in between to give the guest a chance to catch their breath. As you can imagine in August the place is a flurry of activity as designers put the finishing touches on their masterpiece. You hear saws buzzing, you see body parts strewn about, paint, blood, and well…pigs. You’ll have to see for yourself!

Meeting Scott Simmons, one would think that this devilish creation of fright would never come out of someone so quiet and reserved, but he and his very talented team take all the credit. Scarehouse was rated “America’s Scariest Halloween Attraction” by the Travel Channel, and one of the “Top 20 Hometown Haunts in the USA” by Fangoria magazine.

Scarehouse is located in a part of Pittsburgh called Etna, once a booming town full of steel mills and wire spring manufacturers, now a middle class American neighborhood. While driving down Butler Street, one would never suspect this old gray granite building to be home of such frightful fun. There are no spooky facades, or tacky floodlights out front, just an old ominous building, reminiscent of an old bank. But inside, the fun begins.

What was the building prior to Scarehouse?

“It’s had two owners before this. The Elks since the 1940s maybe? They used this floor and the one above us for entertaining and dancing. There is also a duck-pin bowling lane in the floor below. But when it was originally built it was an indoor swimming pool. It’s probably one of the most unique buildings you’ll see. But the swimming pool was eventually covered over and the bowling lanes were added. Recently a ticket was discovered from a 1926 Boxing match, four bouts for fifty cents! The [main floor where Scarehouse is now] was used for the employees to have wedding receptions and live shows. There was a stage in the back with its original flies, big lights, and curtains – probably very expensive to build in the 1920s.”

The first Scarehouse attraction was built in 1999 in a warehouse across the street from the current location. That warehouse is no longer there due to the Rt. 28 expansion. As Scott showed us the second floor where the actors prepare in make-up and costuming, he explained what the condition of the building was like in 2007 after first moving in:

“We were looking for a building we could use all year round. When they found this building it was amazing, because the downstairs main floor was still laid out for a party, and it was still an Elks Lodge, and their decorations were “old school” and faded so it was the closest thing I’ve ever come to a Shining moment. The realtors showed this location in February. Our breath was fogging up and we were using flashlights, because we couldn’t figure out how to turn the lights on because it had been empty for about a year. It looked like a big party room with a bandstand set up with streamers and things hanging. Once behind the stage to see the exposed brick, we knew this was a good space.”

Is the Building leased?

“Yes, when we started we were just leasing the main floor. We just used that space there. Once we expanded to three haunts it became obvious that we needed more space. So then we began leasing the whole facility, because the cast is 80 to 90 people actor-wise. Then you factor in floating actors and ticketing and security, we had about 110 to 135 people on the payroll last year. Plus, we had people wanting to do special events and projects so we started fixing the Events room up. Other people would use this as another haunt, but then where would you store stuff and do make up? So, we do everything up here.”

What is the through-put of this attraction?

“When we opened Scarehouse here in 2007 we had two haunts: Hall of Nightmares and Screamatorium. The one year in particular (2008) we had a really hard time settling in, due to several Web sites, and media publicity – we realized we are now a high through-put attraction. Hall of Nightmares was a more classic design, which didn’t make a lot of sense, sort of designed to be like Tales from the Crypt, or a DC Comics kind of thing. It started out linear in the sense that you were in underground areas, then outdoors, then you came up to a large house, then in the house, in the basement of the house, then outside again. It made sense in the terms of flow, but, was definitely the kind of haunt you could have clowns and ghosts in and everything. Then colors and lighting were very much like you would see in DC Comics, with purples and reds, greens and extreme lighting.”

“Where Screamatorium, the second haunt at the time, was much the other way – very dark and earth tones. It had some medical themes, distressed medical theme, 1940s kinda Silent Hill or House on Haunted Hill, the idea being whatever happened there happened a really, really long time ago, and it was slowly coming back to life. While we had the two haunts, people liked the Hall of Nightmares, but it really didn’t scare them. But they really liked Screamatorium. We had this great dentist…with custom made silicone appliances [on his face]. He was very slow and deliberate in his acting, holding your attention and doing his creepy thing, but his assistant, was the one who would [jump out] and scare you.”

“So we fixed Hall of Nightmares and left Screamatorium alone. That was the first year our attendance started booming. But then Screamatorium became an issue because we started getting “conga lines” backing up in the haunt, and the Dentist room was a good example of how we could not be slow and creepy anymore. This just wasn’t working. That’s when we added the 3D haunt Delerium, which has lasers and dance music, then the third haunt was very dark and bit of a let down, so that’s what led to Rampage last year. We knew whatever we do as a third haunt has to be louder and more aggressive than the other two.
So you had to scare them in the end? Give them something to remember?

“Yes, it became all about the ways of machine guns and giant robots in Rampage.”

Scarehouse employs a large array of special effects throughout the haunt. And it takes some very creative people to pull all this together all year round. In addition to their 14 make-up artists, there are a number of people who work behind the scenes. One of whom is Jason Read who is the Lighting Designer for Scarehouse. Scott explains how he became involved in the creative process:

“Jason was at CMU (Carnegie Mellon University) getting his masters degree in lighting design, a very specific kind of lighting design. But he wanted to get into theme park lighting design; he e-mailed me, and thought he was over-qualified. So I told him, ‘Come on over, it’ll be fun.’ So he did some amazing stuff on Delerium, fixing up Screamatorium, and every year since he has been coming back to town to work on our lighting. Right now he is out in Burbank, CA. He works for a company called Light Switch. It’s got to be surreal for him; as he was doing work for us he was also doing work for Disneyland and on conference calls as he was working here. For the most part we use spot lights, but we are also ‘old school’ still using night lights, and in some cases using battery powered things. If the lighting is done correctly, you won’t even know it’s there. Scarehouse uses many different organic lighting techniques, and is very, very dark in places, but Jason loves what he does, and every year he comes back to make improvements.”

I’ve heard there are many “Chicken Exits” all over the haunt. How often per night do guests chicken-out and what was the most outrageous thing that has happened?

“There are exits all over, including the wheelchair accessible ramps. But it is hard to tell how many people per night, there are security personnel that work the back hallways all night. But the first year we were here, in the Dentist room a woman had a full blown anxiety attack. We took her out the side door, which is more a patio area where all our actors take their breaks, and let her catch her breath and get some fresh air, and every time the door would open another actor would come out on break and so she would scream more, and go into another attack. In retrospect we should have radioed for everyone to clear the area. (laughing) She was a lady in her 30s or 40s but you never know how people will react. We have eight year olds who run through and say it wasn’t scary at all. But then there are other people who are affected in different ways; it’s all very psychologically triggered. For some people it may be the church, others it’s clowns, or dentists! But you can’t scare every one, so for those people you’ve got to give them something else to process and that’s why we take so much time on our sets.”

Scott also talks about some of his characters over the years and why some characters only appear once a year.

“We always get asked why there are no chainsaws. And besides just not liking them, they are just not effective. One year we had one of our make-up artists take an old wedding dress and tattered it and made it up into her
character. Some of the lines she used were, ‘Who are you people?’, ‘Why are you here?’, ‘What kind of shoes are you wearing to a wedding?’, ‘Where are my presents?’ screeching ‘This is my day!’ Often beating people with her bouquet and giving people seething looks as her wedding was ruined. She was great and people remembered her the next year. But it’s like a fireworks display. You can’t keep just jumping out and going, ‘Boo!’ We are not a ‘boo’ haunt. You’ve got to give them more. I still have friends of mine that tour Scarehouse, and three or four scenes into the walk-through they say ‘Wow, this is really elaborate’ or ‘Where do you get the kids to work here?’ Kids? We have 80 some actors, mostly college age and up, some of which are adults in their sixties!”

So the season is essentially two months of business here for you, from the beginning of September to the end of October.

What do you do for the other ten months out of the year?

“Yes, we change a lot of the haunts conceptually during this time. We change a lot of lighting and sound, freshen up existing sets, and tear down others. We conceptualize the next haunt, and throw out all the ideas already for next year. In January/February we are already into the design work for next year. We analyze data and look at Web traffic, and go through the survey results and work on spreadsheets.”

Do the building owners allow you to keep it all up all year?

“No, we are in here all year round. The building is very big and in the winter it gets very cold and we do not heat it, so we don’t do as much construction during this time. But other areas of the business get attention such as the Web site, and promotion, music, budgets and marketing. We don’t have a PR agency; it’s all us. All the graphic arts and photos come from in this building. But usually we know in March as to what we will be advertising for the coming year. For example, when we changed Hall of Nightmares over to The Forsaken, we knew what we needed for story-boarding the concepts.”

“The building is so grand in the sense of the outside style of the building and everything inside, but if we were in a warehouse, we could do whatever we want spatially. But here in this building, we have such spatial limitations, (in the sense of square footage) that to make modification to Rampage for example, it caused this crazy chain reaction of problems all through all the other mazes. So if we move something just a couple of inches one way, or if the set wants to be bigger but can’t be due to limits. So we try maximize the space we have, and utilize what we have. For example, we use overhead wiring for lights and sound. The problem comes with dead space. We don’t have a dead space to store things such as props, so we have to be very conscious of that.”

How does the character development progress throughout the season? Do you try to stick to the story-boarding you plotted out through the year or do you let the actor go with it?

“Mostly we let the actor go with it. But sometimes the actor will develop his/her own personality to that character and will really take off. Other times we work with them to try to adjust the character to make it work best. In the case of Delerium 3D we tried to base the whole thing around one iconic character – Delerium. Her character is very out there, a very high energy party girl. But we try to do things a little different such as the puppet in Delerium. Hard core haunters will shurg their shoulders, but others will be really surprised by this stunt. We very rarely find that we need a certain iconic character. We kind of build the costumes and the sets around ideas and it all becomes very organic. But for example, Rampage is out there – you are thrown in the middle of a war between two factions and the characters have to have a certain ‘steampunk’ look to them. Or this year in The Forsaken, the characters are just that, forgotten about, forsaken, dark, dirty. So you will find these themes running throughout the haunts.”

“In last year’s Hall of Nightmares, Creepo the Clown, was such a big hit (thanks to the internet trailer, and his excellent acting skills), we decided to bring him back in The Forsaken. His character was all improvised, as a dirty, old, sometimes drunk clown, who should have retired years ago, but didn’t, and probably hates kids. He has his own section this year and it wasn’t like we said we need a clown. It actually just happened, and was a success.”

Out of all the other haunts in the Pittsburgh area what makes Scarehouse stand out the most?

“There are some amazing Haunts in Pennsylvania in general. We have some solid haunts here in Pittsburgh. But what makes it stand out is that our design and detail is probably higher than others’. We have the luxury of being here all year round. I think it’s the conceptual stuff. [Guests] have never seen a haunted house such as Delerium 3D with the music and the lasers and all the weird crazy stuff. In Rampage with its war theme – other haunts have done this type of stuff, but with ours we have the steampunk theme through out, very George Orwell, shouting propaganda, machine guns, and a giant robot at the end. Many people have seen the clowns in 3D, or haunted hospital scenes, but people remember us because we are so different. Whether you think it’s effective or not, it’s something different. We are not afraid to make changes or take away popular characters (such as the Bride or the Dentist). We don’t want people to get tired of it before we get tired of it.”

Scott uses many different theatrical and theme park influences in Scarehouse. For example, the entrance is actually in the back of the old building, making good use of the hilly sidewalk as a queue line. The box office has three entrances to speed up the process, Pay on premise, Advanced/Web ticket sale, and (my favorite), RIP Ticket holders – Really Important People – of course! Once inside you enter into a bullpen area themed into a Vaudeville style old movie theater, complete with a projector and silver screen to set the mood. Scott uses many storytelling techniques used by major theme parks, including Disney. On the walls are old movie posters of several horror movies, and movie trailers being projected on the screen to help get you in the mood, before getting your pants scared off. Home-made trailers and movie posters are also intermixed in the experience to give the guest a taste of what they are about to get into.

You are now ready to enter into Scarehouse. The first maze you enter is The Forsaken. I bet this is the part you’re just dying to read about. But alas, DAFE members will have to see Scarehouse for themselves to really appreciate Scott’s incredible work. As this is part one of my two part Scarehouse seasonal haunt article. I hope to see all of you at our DAFE event soon.
I have never experienced another darkride like the *Laff in the Dark* at Crystal Beach, and I doubt I ever will. Growing up in Buffalo and riding this classic darkride every summer from when I was probably two years old really made an impression on me from a very early age. For starters, I generically referred to all darkrides as a “*Laff in the Dark*”. At that age, I had no comprehension at all about the difference between Pretzel, Traver/Chambers or any other make. If you got into a two person car and rode through the dark, it was generically known to me as a “*Laff in the Dark*”. Despite that, I clearly knew that the Crystal Beach ride WAS different from any others I’d ridden, starting with the cars. Those COMFORTABLE cars where the seats leaned way back! The chain drive from the big motors made a very distinctive buzzing/sizzling sound, just like a *Tumble Bug*. And the speed—man, these things were FAST! Compared to other darkrides, this one really moved.

The smells that resulted from a combination of an old wooden building and a bit of ozone from occasional electric sparks were also unforgettable. Then there were the stunts inside. Classic mechanical things like a wooden skeleton doing a shimmy, a kicking mule, Popeye punching out Wimpy, Maggie beating Jiggs over the head with a rolling pin, and a big steam locomotive near the end of the ride. On top of all that, there were also a couple of mechanical sound effects and several areas of “jazz track” that made you feel as though your car was going over ruts in the road! Overall, there was nothing really scary or gory inside, just fun, goofy stuff, hence the name of the ride. My all time favorite stunt was the whistling snake, probably because the snake would lunge forward opening its mouth and it made a crazy whistling sound produced by a slide whistle. It was a very unforgettable sound, and to this day I can hear it quite clearly in my mind as though I was riding through the ride.

In later years as I got more into the hobby and interested in the history of such things, I would come to find out that this *Laff in the Dark* was built in 1936 in a building previously used in the park as a bowling alley. In fact, walking through the ride with the lights on, you could clearly see the wooden alleys in the floor. The cars and stunts were supplied by the R.E. Chambers Company of Beaver Falls, PA (successor to the legendary Traver Engineering Company).

Crystal Beach kept this ride up quite well, right up until
the end of the final season in 1989. Stunts were kept in very good working order and the ride’s exterior was kept brightly painted with lots of color. Starting to see the disappearance of many older classic darkrides especially in the 1980s, I would savor the experience of the Crystal Beach Laff in the Dark every time I’d ride through it, knowing that this was truly a rare treasure from the past complete with original cars and many original working stunts. Sadly after the closing of Crystal Beach Park, this rare darkride was broken up piecemeal. I hope that many of you reading this were fortunate enough to have ridden through this wonderful link to the amusement park past when it was still in operation and had the chance to “laff in the dark” for yourself!
Photos by Dan Wilke
The Ocean Park Amusement Pier in Santa Monica, California, was home to the Spooks darkride in this rather famous old photo from the early 1950s. Forever captured in time, the ride operator appears to be nonchalantly reading a book as the old sea hag in the ticket booth glares menacingly at the photographer. The vintage Pretzel ride cars are aligned and waiting for passengers. It seems to be a rather slow evening, perhaps the off season near closing time.

Most likely, this classic darkride had another theme and title or two before its Spooks incarnation. Those who would know for sure are probably dead by now; they’re REAL - Spooks! (groan)

Fast forward a few years and the opening of Disneyland inspires the transformation of the old amusement pier into Pacific Ocean Park. The new makeover was financed by the Los Angeles Turf Club and the CBS television broadcast network. They closed the pier after Labor Day, hired the best amusement park designers and Hollywood SFX experts, and began to design innovative new attractions for the theme park. More than 80 special effects men, scenic designers and artists worked for more than a year on the project. They, like Disney, found corporate sponsors to share the expenses of some of the exhibits. To save money, they renovated existing buildings and incorporated several of the old attractions into the layout. Among the old attractions getting a face lift was the venerable Spooks darkride. Still a darkride, it was now transformed into an odd novelty called Round the World in 80 Turns, no doubt inspired by the Mike Todd movie of that same period, Around the World in 80 Days. The Pretzel ride cars were probably replaced at that time, with the new high back spinning models, which whipped the riders from side to side during their journey through an ‘educational’ scenic darkride trip. This followed the same lines of thinking that gave birth to Freedomland’s Earthquake and Tornado darkrides. The riders were now being given a subliminal true life adventure experience in addition to their darkride thrills.

The complaints of nausea and headache apparently caused by these new Pretzel vehicles shortly brought an end to the Round the World in 80 Turns theme. The last incarnation of this ride, Fun in the Dark, followed swiftly afterward. The Pretzel spinning cars were somewhat modified so that they didn’t whip their passengers with such force. The ride again was classic Laff in the Dark complete with Laffing Sal. It had a country bumpkin Lil’ Abner/Dogpatch theme, as you journeyed through farms and fields upsetting moonshiners, revenuers, and farm animals who scattered to get out of the way of your approaching spinning ride car. After crashing through Mammy Yokum’s laundry on the clothesline and the pigsties, you were on your way down the railroad tracks to face the inevitable oncoming train. The designer had most likely ridden Disneyland’s Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride.

Unfortunately, the money wasn’t spent to maintain and upkeep the new Disneyland on the pier, and Pacific Ocean Park – known as POP – was on its way to being a happy memory in less than a decade. Fun in the Dark’s Laffing Sal just stopped laughing one day, and stood as still as a statue until this vintage old darkride housing was ultimately gutted into its last transformation as a holding tank for money making carny type games of skill. When the park was closed for good and the rides auctioned off, there was no reminder at all of the great classic darkrides which had been tenants of this venerable old art deco amusement structure. www.rippop.com
Inside the Industry
With Derek Rochelle

In this issue, Derek interviews Scott Simmons, Executive Producer and Marketing Director for The ScareHouse haunted attraction in Pittsburgh, PA.

Derek Rochelle: First of all, Scott, would you mind telling us a little bit about yourself?

Scott Simmons: I’m a die-hard fan of theme parks, dark rides, and haunted houses – partially because it’s one of the few forms of creative expression that allows you to create a completely immersive environment while still creating strong emotional reactions from customers; but mostly because they require so many different but connected forms of creativity. I love to gather together groups of people from wildly different backgrounds and let them influence each other, which is why I love working on The ScareHouse. Where else would I be able to get so many people together in the same place and see what kind of creative experiences they unleash? I love to gather together some of the most creative and driven people I can find, and then stay out of their way!

DR: Makes perfect sense to me! How did you get your start in such a fun industry? Tell us the story of your creative journey.

SS: I’ve always been a huge fan of monsters, horror movies, and Halloween…even though I was scared of pretty much everything and anything when I was growing-up. I’m old enough to remember being equally fascinated and terrified by the shows and movies that used to run regularly on TV in the mid to late 70s. This was back when you could still catch classic Hammer horror movies on cable, along with Godzilla flicks or Night Gallery reruns. I loved watching them, even though I was rarely able to sleep afterward.

I’m also lucky to be a Pittsburgh native, which means I grew up just 15 minutes away from Kennywood and their classic dark rides. While I’ve always enjoyed movies and the thrills offered by a well-crafted horror flick, I soon realized that nothing on the screen could compare with the rush I felt anytime I entered a dark ride, haunted house, or really just about any kind of themed attraction. Then and now, I just love being completely immersed in that kind of environment.

I’m not necessarily a nostalgic person, but I certainly miss the innocence and rush that accompanied the first trips through a dark ride like Le Cachot…or going through a YMCA haunted house filled with teenagers in cheap rubber masks.

I became interested in haunted houses for the same reason I became involved with making movies and videos – I loved the reactions from the audience. It’s fantastic when people scream and laugh – the adrenaline that fills the space.

In the 80s I started volunteering at a non-profit haunted house for the local YMCA, and it was honestly a life-changing experience. It wasn’t just the rush of creating sets and seeing the reactions, but it was also the sense of community that I found. I continued working at non-profits for several years, eventually moving on to a big fundraiser attraction for the city of Pittsburgh firefighters…and that’s where I met Barb, who is now my wife and one of the owners of The ScareHouse.

Dad was always helping with the more serious construction projects in my early years of haunting, and once we decided to go professional he came on as the third owner. It took quite some time for us to transition from working at non-profit haunts to launching The ScareHouse, because you have to understand that the haunted attraction business was quite different in the 90s. There was no internet, no industry magazines and books, no associations, and really no way to connect with other haunted house and/or dark ride fans or vendors. It was the early 90s, the three of us knew we wanted to open a for-profit haunted attraction in Pittsburgh that would be as elaborate and professional as possible…and we honestly had no idea how to make that happen.

Granted, for most of the 90s I was focused on starting my career in television production – which certainly required more than a little time and effort. But even as I was working long hours as a producer at one of the local TV stations, I was still researching and exploring different ideas.

It was around 1997 when several things started coming together: some of the first haunt-themed Web sites came online, Haunted Attraction magazine started publishing, Kevin McCurdy started releasing his “how to” haunted house videos, and we found out about the Transworld Halloween convention. It was mind-blowing. For more than a decade the three of us had been struggling to find fellow haunters who felt the same as we did; now we were suddenly in this entire network of haunters from across the country.

The ScareHouse had its first season in 1999, but we mostly operated out of different locations with short-term leases – and some seasons we couldn’t even open at all. We learned a lot, but also realized that the only way we could truly create something that met the expectations of our customers (and ourselves) was to secure a year-round location. It took us several years, and many long conversations with fellow haunters like Kevin and Ben Armstrong (Netherworld) before we finally secured our building here in Etna.

DR: An amazing story! Now, let’s talk about The ScareHouse in Pittsburgh, which you co-own with your wife and father. I must say that after doing a little research about your attraction, I was blown away by the photos and videos. The ScareHouse looks phenomenal! Tell us a bit about how the attraction evolved into what it is today.
SS: Finding a year-round location was and is key to our success. We tried the short-term/seasonal approach and while it did provide us with all kinds of great experiences, resources, and assets...it’s just not a solid business model. I think you need stability so that the customers know how to find you, for one thing. Changing locations every year makes it very rough to build a loyal fan base.

Creatively, of course, having a year-round location allows us to really develop some highly elaborate sets, effects, and concepts. When we first started, the three of us were running the haunted house while still working 40+ hours a week at our “day jobs”...now we’re able to devote all of our time to The ScareHouse all year long. We’re able to start talking about design concepts in December, and can actually start building sets in the middle of winter. That definitely makes a HUGE difference in the level of production detail and design.

We also have some of the most positive, professional, and talented artists I’ve ever met working for us as designers and builders. As time has gone on I find that we’re spending less and less money on big animations and outside haunted house vendors, and instead giving our own team of people more time and room to create totally new and unique sets, creatures, and concepts. There are thousands of haunted houses and dark rides out there, and many of them have similar effects and creations...but we take great pride in creating scenes and characters that only exist at The ScareHouse.

DR: Well all that effort seems to pay off; The ScareHouse is critically acclaimed, having been featured a couple of times on The Travel Channel TV specials and having had rave reviews in Fangoria and other magazines and newsletters. Tell us...what sets The ScareHouse apart from all the others?

SS: I think we have three key factors that make us stand out: Production, Concept, and Attitude.

With production, we make every effort to make our attractions feel as immersive and realistic as possible (except in the case of something like Delirium 3-D, which is deliberately non-linear and demented). It’s not just about filling the sets with as many props and details as possible, it also means spending a great deal of time and thought working out the designs for lighting, sound, costumes, and music. We’re all huge fans of theme park attractions, and we strive to match their level of detail and commitment.

Speaking of theme parks, I love how both Universal Studios and Busch Gardens approach their Halloween events. A few years before we secured our location, during one of our “off” seasons, Barb and I were able to attend both events...and honestly it was a real game-changer for us. It wasn’t just that their attractions were and are so heavily-detailed and professional, which probably goes without saying...it was the fact that they had created entire attractions around concepts and ideas that were so completely innovative and unique. Their designers weren’t limiting themselves to doing attractions on the tried-and-true of haunted mansions, mental hospitals, and crazy clowns. They were pushing the envelope with high-concept and super-themed attractions that were unlike anything I’d seen before. I would never want to copy a specific concept or idea from the parks, but I loved their willingness to try something unique and contemporary...and that certainly inspired us to think out of the box with our own attractions. Both Delirium 3-D and RAMPAGE are unlike any other attraction in the country.

And one of the reasons why our haunts feel so different is not just the conceptual design of the sets and characters, but also in the attitude and execution. So many haunted houses tend to stick with a very limited spectrum of emotions and attitudes...but we really like to mash up different influences, push different buttons, and also add a little dark humor to everything we do. This year, for example, one of our new characters is nothing more than a guy in a dirty bunny suit...with an axe. I love the reactions. People laugh because it seems so random, and yet it’s also deeply disturbing for reasons that can be hard to define. That’s the exact reaction we like to achieve. Do you remember the tag-line from the movie Creepshow? The most fun you’ll ever have being scared? That applies to us as well.

DR: You explained it perfectly...totally makes sense. From the photos I’ve seen, The Scarehouse looks like it indeed rivals Universal’s Halloween events as far as sets, costumes, make-up, and effects go. How many folks are involved in the creative process each year? What all is involved in producing this Hollywood-caliber attraction?

SS: If there’s one thing I could say about our team it’s that just about everyone is very good at multi-tasking, and no one is content to do just one thing.

When the haunt is in full operation, we’ll have as many as 130 people on payroll. That includes actors, make-up artists, security, and customer service – but the core creative team is relatively small. In addition to the three owners, we employ two “Design Managers” – Dejah Harnish and Chris Gilgour – and the bulk of the design and building originates with the five of us as a unit. Chris and Dejah, who are both very talented effects artists, have brought most of our iconic creatures and characters to life – but they are also involved in scenic design, painting, and hundreds of other creative decisions.

Once we reach spring, the team expands to include additional builders and designers – as well as our lighting, costume, and designers who will travel into town for a while to help install on-site. Our sound designer, Glenn “Delirium Dog” Ricci, has been working with me on haunted houses for 25 years now. He creates nearly a full hour of sound effects and environments every year, and also installs all the hardware on site. He’s also created the original ScareHouse musical theme (which is referenced multiple times in the attraction, not unlike “Grim, Grinning Ghosts” at Haunted Mansion) – and all of the music you hear on our ScareHouse CD.

DR: I understand that you also have experience as a writer and producer in broadcast media. How has that expertise helped you in the haunted attraction industry?

SS: One of the mistakes that many businesses make, and not just haunted attractions, is that they will spend a tremendous amount of time and money creating very elaborate attractions – but then spend very little attention or effort on their marketing and commercial production. I have worked within the field of television production and promotion for a long time now, and I knew it was vital that we regularly produced high-impact photos and video that fully represents The ScareHouse. That means that each image has to
not only look good, but that it also has to reinforce the core values I mentioned earlier: production, concept, and attitude. I think that most attractions design and build a haunt, and perhaps decide to shoot promotional photos or videos close to opening. In our case, the conversations about our Web site, PR, and video start almost immediately after we start new designs. I’ll determine which characters and concepts we want to highlight, and which sets are the most photogenic, and we will base our physical production schedule around the video. The sets that best represent our mood of any given year (and we significantly change and alter our attraction every year) are always the first sets we build.

The production background also means that we can continue to expand the mythology behind our characters using custom videos and other messages that I produce just for our Web site or even just within the attraction.

**DR:** Well, I for one am impressed with the stuff on your Web site. So, who or what has been your inspiration over the years in this industry?

**SS:** I am still inspired and excited by so many people in both the haunted house and amusement industries. Kevin McCurdy is our Yoda. His training videos provided an invaluable education in scenic design skills. TJ Manna-rino and the rest of his art and design team from Universal. Ben Armstrong and Billy Messina from Netherworld haunted house in Atlanta. Cydney Neil, David Cleveinger, Brett Bertolino, Pat Kono-pelski…honestly I could name dozens of people who continue to inspire us.

**DR:** Ownership of The ScareHouse is a real “family affair” for you. What’s it like working with your wife and father? What roles do they play in the creative and business processes?

**SS:** All three of us are very heavily involved in all parts of the “hands on” man- ufacture and production processes, and we’re all involved in the creative and business processes. It’s all part of the total commitment to multi-tasking. Any one of us can run a power tool or do scenic painting/detail, or co-ordinate operational or marketing procedures, or deal with the technical effects work…but we definitely have specific areas of expertise where we focus most of our energy.

**DR:** Well it WORKS! So…have you guys ever considered adding a dark ride to The ScareHouse?

**SS:** There’s just so much potential with a dark ride (or even a hayride) and I know our crew would LOVE to work on a fully-automated attraction. I’m completely envious of anyone who has ever been able to design and create something like that. We just don’t have nearly enough room in our building to add something like that, unfortunately. That’s the good news/bad news about being in a historic building: tons of atmosphere, but not really much space for a complete dark ride. Certainly our team would love to get involved with a dark ride at some point. I think that would be a tremendous amount of fun.

**DR:** Do you have any funny behind-the-scenes stories to share with us? Maybe some particularly crazy customer moments?

**SS:** I know this sounds suspect, considering that we’re running a haunted house attraction…but just about every person on our crew has experience with some manner of paranormal or unusual activ-

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ity within our building. Not even the entire building, but a very specific section. Our building is nearly 90 years old, and talking with the previous tenants – local members of the Elks lodge – has regularly confirmed that people have experienced weird stuff in that specific part of our building for decades.

Last summer we had a guy at our place doing some construction. Great guy, big guy…and not someone who frightens easily. He had heard some of the rumors, but scoffed at the stories. We left the building to take care of some errands and left him alone, in the specific section of our building, for about half an hour. When we came back we found him sitting outside on the steps. “Never again,” he said.

**DR:** Too funny! Of all the darkrides, funhouses, and haunted attractions (other than your own) that you personally have visited, do any stand out as favorites? Why?

**SS:** It probably goes without saying that I love *Haunted Mansion*, but I have to say that right now most of my favorite dark rides are at the Universal theme parks. If I lived in Orlando I honestly think that I would probably ride *Men In Black* just about every week. I’m crazy about the *JAWS* ride. And the new Harry Potter ride is completely jaw-dropping.

I still have a warm spot in my heart for the original *Old Mill* at Kennywood. I guess I understand why it was changed over to Garfield, but I still miss the wonderful old vibe of it...the weathered wood and the dark corners, the skeletons in the jail cell, the way it mixed outdoor and indoor scenes...all great stuff that was such a core part of my growing up.

**DR:** It was a great ride. So, when you aren’t working, what do you enjoy doing? Got any hobbies?

**SS:** I’m still a huge fan of movies, and that’s probably obvious by the very cinematic nature of the trailers that we produce every year. I wish I could find more time to see more stuff, but the schedule really keeps us pretty booked all year long. We’re both hoping to be able to do much more travel in the post-season. I love the adventure of exploring a new location, and really digging into the environment of a different town.

**DR:** And finally, since DAFE members love to be scared, I must ask you, what scares Scott Simmons?

**SS:** Rainy weather in October!

**DR:** Great answers! Thanks, Scott!

To learn more about *The ScareHouse*, check out [www.scarehouse.com](http://www.scarehouse.com)
This issue’s patent by the prolific fun-house device inventor Herbert N Ridgway was patented August 30, 1910.

This “Improvement in Amusement Apparatus” “…involves a revolving or rotating platform having an upper surface on which persons may sit, stand, or move about.”

“The object of the invention is to provide a novel device of this character in which the rotation platform has an upper surface of such a shape that it will be difficult for person to maintain their position on it when the platform is rotating rapidly, and still more difficult for a person to step on to the revolving platform and maintain his equilibrium.”

Ridgway envisioned the device using either a convex or a concave surface and included drawings and descriptions for both in his patent. Figure 1 is a plan view of the device using a convex floor. Figure 2 is a cut-away side view of the same device. Figure 3 shows a plan view of the concave version while figure 4 is a cut-way side view of the same. Figure 5 is detail showing how the rotating section, Figure 5-3a would sit in the platform Figure 5-11.

The device itself was quite simple, requiring only well made, polished wood surfaces and a simple motor, gears and drive shaft in addition to the supporting structure. Note that a speed control, Figure 2-24, allowed the operator to control the rotation of the disks.

The concave version, Figure 3, was designed to simply spin people off onto the floor while the convex version, Figure 1, included padded walls, Figure 2-50 to stop riders as they were flung off a bit too fast.