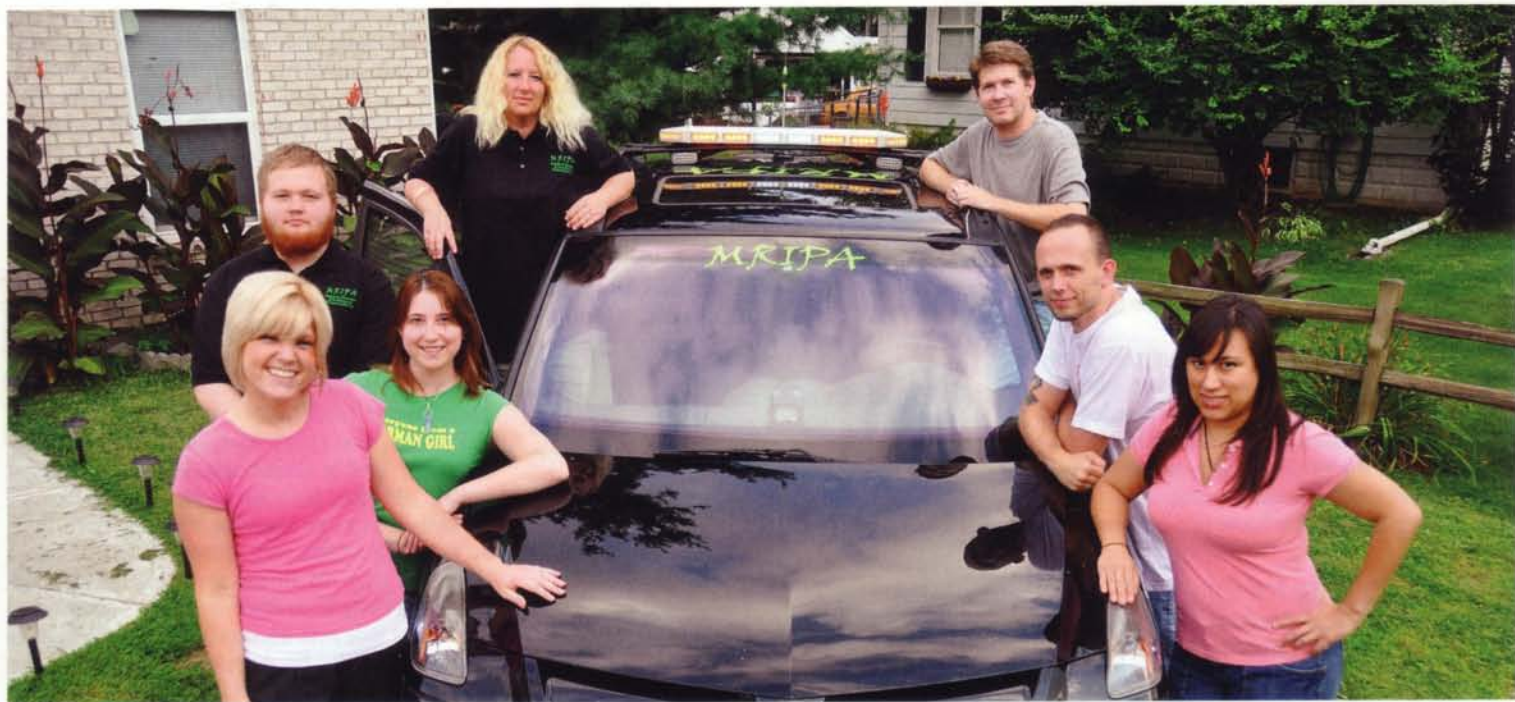


Investigating the paranormal

Group investigates the strange, out-of-place and paranormal



The "Anomaly Response Team" with their mobile research vehicle are, lower left and clockwise, Rachel Weinrich, Amber Hoskins, Sean Boggs, Andrea Neuffer, founder Jason Baker, Wes Booth and Michelle Booth.

STORY BY **ALEASHA SANDLEY** PHOTOS BY **SCOTT L. MILEY**

When employees had the strange sensation of being watched while working at the Elks Lodge 209, lodge secretary Dick Dunn knew he had to figure out what was going on.

The employees had complained of being watched while they were alone in the bar and kitchen and had reported having strange feelings in the lodge's banquet hall and business office — especially around the office's closet. Strange lights occasionally bounced off the kitchen's shiny surfaces, leaving employees mystified.

When one secretary at the lodge refused to be in the building by herself, Dunn called the only people he thought could help: the Midwestern Researchers

and Investigators of Paranormal Activity.

"We had several complaints about employees saying there was spooks in here, so we had them come in here and prove them wrong," Dunn said.

Dunn's skepticism was fine by MRIPA founder and lead investigator Jason Baker. His goal is to find whatever subtle oddities make people feel strange, whether they are paranormal or not.

"We make sense out of the senseless," Baker said. "A lot of the groups that are out there now, they only go looking for a thrill and trying to prove ghosts. I'm only looking for the truth, and that's what I pass on to people with questions."

In the Elks Lodge case, Baker, his fiancée and MRIPA case manager Rachel Weinrich and five

other investigators joined Dunn in the lodge overnight on Oct. 18. They took photos, videos and audio recordings of the lodge to determine whether the employees' feelings were caused by something supernatural.

"We usually overkill everything," Baker said. "We put way more cameras than we really need; audio recorders, we leave running for the entire night. A lot of times the stuff we pick up is either when we left the house or there's no one around."

After hours in the lodge, Baker and his crew took the footage they collected back to their headquarters in Indianapolis and analyzed it. About a month later, Dunn got his answer: The lodge was not haunted.



Reflections and strange sounds

"That was a good example of a typical investigation," Baker said of the Elks Lodge. "Many people had claimed to have strange experiences, felt uncomfortable, nausea, nervous and anxious. People actually quit because they were positive that the place was haunted."

"As usual, it turns out to be explainable problems: bad wiring, light fixtures about to go out, electromagnetic fields. They were very happy we found nothing."

In MRIPA's report from the night at the lodge, Baker says some of the strange sensations felt by employees were the result of cars driving by at night whose lights could be recreated with flashlights.

"All claims of uncomfortability and strange sensations were caused by very high amounts of electrical magnetic waves given off by unshielded wiring, ceiling lights and power boxes in the areas that people have reported feeling strange sensations and feeling the sense as if being watched," the report says.

Dunn said the employees felt more comfortable in the lodge after MRIPA's investigation turned up nothing paranormal.

"I wish I could put in here there were a bunch of spooks in here, but I can't," he said.

Not just ghosts

MRIPA investigates any paranormal phenomena, what Bakers calls "anything that cannot be reason-



Top: Sean Boggs, investigator, tracks activity on computer equipment. Above: Infrared cameras are used to record paranormal activity at investigation scenes.

Who you gonna call?

The Midwestern Researchers and Investigators of Paranormal Activity offers free investigative services to those who report paranormal phenomena.

- ◆ Call the group's 24-hour information line at 317-366-5983
- ◆ Visit MRIPA's Web site at mripa.net

The MRIPA investigative tools include dowsing rods at lower front, electromagnetic field detectors at left, and hand-held communicators, right.



ably explained." The group could research the lost city of Pompeii, strange lights, UFOs, metaphysics or haunted sites.

While 90 percent of the time, investigations turn up reasonable explanations for seemingly strange happenings, MRIPA has run into phenomena such as disembodied voices and sounds, action taking place when no one is around, items moving, shadows and semi-transparent apparitions, Baker said.

The group is mainly interested in helping and educating the public; it performs all its investigations for free. Most people are just looking for peace of mind, Baker said.

"There's more people that want us to tell them that nothing is there," he said. "There are a few that get very angry when you tell them there's nothing there."

Weinrich said no one in the group jumps the gun when investigating a possible paranormal situation.

"I'm not going to hype," she said. "I really want real data if there's something paranormal there or not. We all go in with the idea that it's not haunted, but we are all open to be proven wrong."

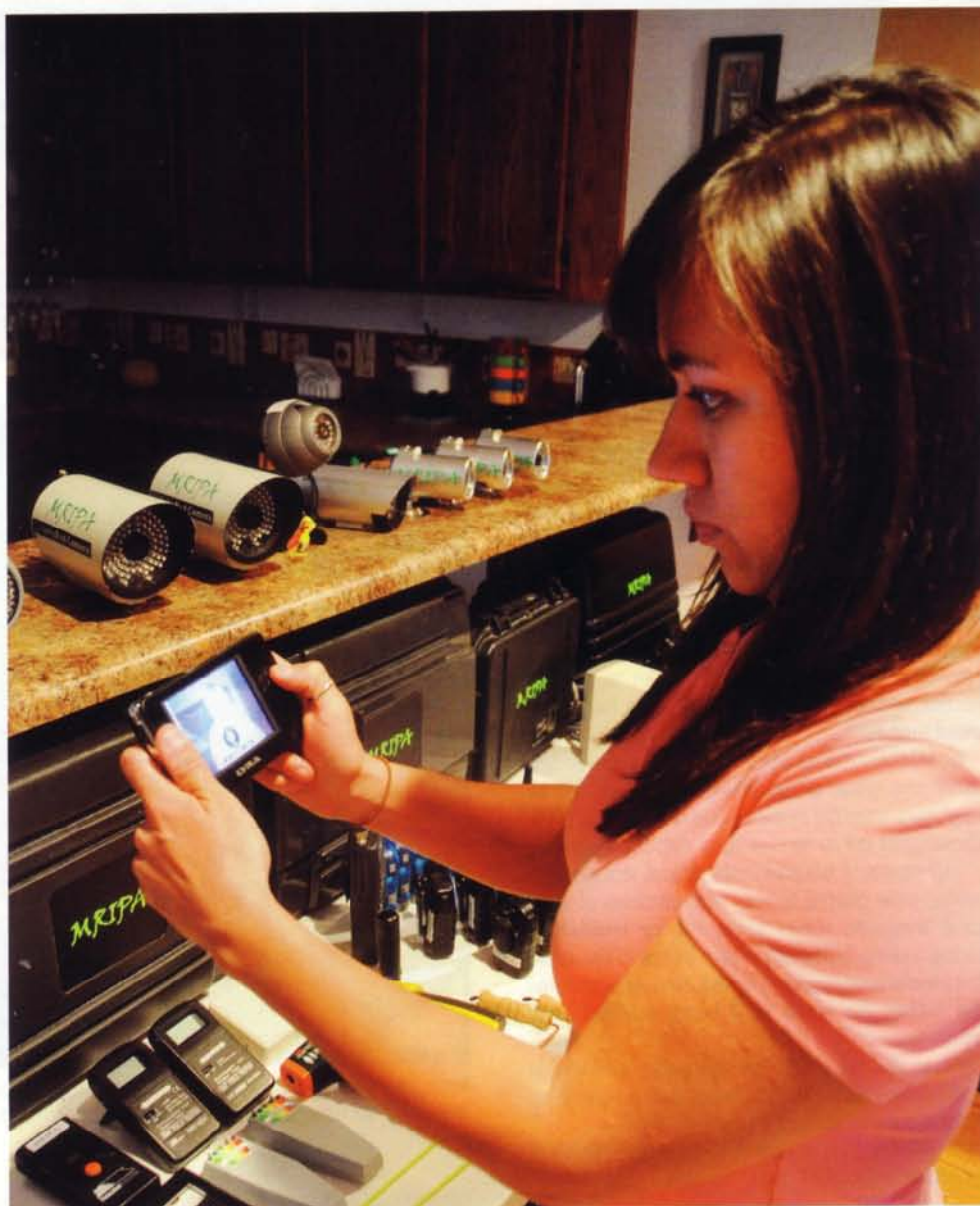
Runs in the family

Baker got started on his interest in the paranormal when he was young. His grandfather, a Christian minister, "had seen a lot of crazy things," Baker said, and was interested in lost civilizations, strange phenomena and UFOs.

"He would talk to us about the things that he had seen and got us very interested," he said. "When he died in 1996, that's when I decided to start my own team."

The team now has 14 members, scattered all over the state. Investigations start off with a call to Weinrich, who asks about the caller's experiences with what he or she thinks might be paranormal activity. After getting a layout of the building or grounds that will be investigated and further detailing the situation, Weinrich usually can tell if it's a legitimate investigation.

"It's easy to pick out people that are trying to yank your chain," she said. "You know when you're dealing with people that are trying to get attention



Michelle Booth, tech specialist, watches video results from a taping recently held at a theater.

or just being goofy.”

Legitimate investigations are forwarded to Baker, who sets up a personal meeting with the caller and a walk-through of the property.

“That way, you also get a better notion of whether people are making it up or not,” Weinrich said. “We want to make sure we aren’t bringing our team members into a situation that isn’t good for everybody.”

After the investigation, the team brings its findings back for analysis to determine whether they can classify any happenings as paranormal. Sometimes, they can discount the occurrences as explainable before they even leave the premises.

The unbelievers

“Back in ‘96, you didn’t really want to tell anybody that you did this kind of stuff,” Baker said. “People are more open (now). They’re not as scared to talk about it anymore. Our group has built up such a reputation for being completely honest and transparent, most people know if they do have a question or opinion, they can come straight to us.”

At first, questions and even jeers directed toward Baker’s paranormal investigators bothered him. For the last few years, however, he’s gotten used to it.

“As time goes by, it’s just like if you tell someone you like to play chess,” he said. “They either accept it or not. It doesn’t really bother me.”

Weinrich said even when the group was featured in Anderson’s July 4 Midnight Parade, some parents wouldn’t allow their children to accept



Wes Booth, personnel manager for MRIPA, views an infrared recording made at a recent paranormal activity investigation scene.

beads and candy from the group.

“You have people that laugh at you when you’re driving down the road,” she said. “I always think, do you guys really know how much fun we’re having doing this and how much our eyes have been opened?”

Baker said other people’s thoughts haven’t

deterred him from what he’s been interested in since he was young. When asked if he had a specific theory regarding the existence of paranormal and supernatural beings, he said he was still a student in the matter.

“I’ve found a few of my answers in the journey,” he said. “That’s the joy of the hunt.” ■

SINCE 1977

- Painting Interior and Exterior
- Wallpaper & Vinyl
- Plastering
- Drywall
- EIFS

DENNIS Mallernee
Painting & Plastering Inc.

905 W. 37th St.
Anderson, Indiana **644-4873**

One thing you can count on
when the rest of the afternoon
has left you down.

(765) 649-5545 **merry maids**
Relax. It's Done.™

1968 in America

Step back in time to 1968!

Visit the *1968 In America* exhibit at Minnetrista now through Jan. 7 and learn how the major events of that year impacted East Central Indiana. *1968 In America* will explore events of that year, from the first images of the whole Earth to the look and sounds of an average teenager’s room. Amazing artifacts and period music will transport you to a bygone era.

Media Partners:
The Star Press WTVB

Minnetrista
NATURE • HISTORY
GARDENS • ART

Exhibit hours:
Mon. – Sat., 9 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.,
Sun., 11 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

General Admission:
Child/Student \$4; Senior \$6;
Adult \$7; Members FREE