

Taking paranormal mainstream

Wednesday, Nov. 1, 2006

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Not long ago, Laine Crosby helped market The Weather Channel's popular Internet site and later ran her own marketing business, attracting high-tech clients.

These days, the Derwood woman helps run a business of a different — and seasonably appropriate — sort.

Crosby recently co-founded a company that plans to produce audio and video shows that can be downloaded to iPods and computers related to a subject close to her: the paranormal.

"I want to help make the paranormal more mainstream," said Crosby, who holds a master's degree in business administration from Georgia State University and studied international law and finance at the University of London and the University of Tours in France. "I am using my marketing background to show how it can help people."

Crosby, who said she began regularly talking to ghosts soon after she moved from Atlanta to Montgomery County in 2004, is not alone in her pursuits. The Maryland Ghost and Spirit Association, a group that organizes ghostly expeditions, lectures and related events, has grown from a handful of people to about 5,000 members in its six years.

Beverly Litsinger, president of the association, attributes its growth to an untapped curiosity in the supernatural.

"People want to know, for instance, what will happen after they die," she said.

Some 75 percent of Americans believe in an aspect of the paranormal, such as telepathy or ghosts, according to a Gallup Poll released last year.

More people seem open to ghosts and other paranormal phenomena in Maryland than in her native Georgia, Crosby said.

Ghosts at an early age

In Crosby's case, she didn't seek out the spirits that she said sometimes appear before her; they seemed to gravitate toward her.

"When I was a child, ghosts would talk to me," Crosby said. "I shut that down because it kind of frightened me."

After earning an undergraduate degree in economics from Agnes Scott College in Georgia, Crosby started working at Wachovia Corp. as a personal banker. She met people in the marketing department and found she liked that line of work.

Upon earning her MBA, she worked for Coke USA, then returned to Wachovia as a marketing manager, helping launch its investment division. Next came a three-year stint as a marketing manager for The Weather Channel.

Crosby, who got married while working at The Weather Channel, said she wasn't involved in anything supernatural until much later, following a move to Derwood in 2004. She wanted to have children and started her own marketing and writing

business shortly before having twins. Clients included businesses at Georgia Tech's Advanced Technology Development Center, one of the oldest business incubators in the nation, dating to 1981.

Strange happenings

Crosby's husband was offered a job in Rockville in 2003, and the family initially lived in Alexandria, Va., before moving to a former plantation home in Derwood.

That's when strange things started.

She'd wake to find all of her kitchen cabinet doors open. Doors would lock and unlock by themselves. One of her children's Bob the Builder toy would proclaim, "I am in control."

"That wasn't one of the messages the toy was supposed to say," Crosby said. "It didn't last in the house too long."

Crosby found out about the Maryland ghost group and contacted Litsinger.

"I went to her house and talked to her ghosts," said Litsinger, who also runs a Randallstown nonprofit consulting business. "She soon found she could hear them, too."

Crosby began to work with historical associations, groups and individuals who reported strange "hauntings." Among those was the Needwood Mansion in Derwood, which the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission purchased in 1961 to use as county offices for researchers, archaeologists and others.

Mark Nesbitt, a former National Park Service historian and author of a series of books called "Ghosts of Gettysburg," said he met Crosby in 2005 while on a ghost-hunting expedition at Needwood. He has since worked with her at other sites and helped start the production company, Dead On Productions, which is run out of an office he has in Middle River.

The first company audio casts will soon be available from the company's Internet site, Crosby said. Videos are scheduled by the end of the year. There will be interviews with writers, historians, mediums and others, she said.

She has not charged people to inspect their reported hauntings and sometimes she will "help ghosts cross over, or help people understand why they are there," as Crosby sees that as a service. She doesn't focus just on spirits, as she sometimes sees images in her mind and experiences other psychic phenomena. She has also worked on missing persons and murder cases.

"I enjoy crossing over ghosts and talking with them because I learn a lot about history," said Crosby, who calls herself an investigative medium, not a ghost buster or ghost whisperer.

"My father was a historian and genealogist, so I come by this love naturally."

Or, some might say, supernaturally.

This report originally appeared in The Business Gazette.

