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Boo! Ghost tours, séances to be offered in Tavares



By **Christine Show**, Orlando Sentinel
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TAVARES — A walk through the city's downtown may soon turn a bit spooky.

The owners of Dreamland Productions, a Lake County-based company that produces murder-mystery shows, want to host ghost tours and séances at Wooton Park beginning this summer. City Council members Wednesday are expected to decide whether to allow the company to use the park to put on weekend night shows.

"We have fallen in love with Tavares. We realized there's so much history here," said Connie Gay, who owns Dreamland Productions along with her husband, Jeff.

The couple is looking to produce hair-raising ghost tours around downtown that will include haunting special effects and offer stories based on Tavares history. For example, an old building in Tavares that was once infested with bats and then mysteriously burned down may likely become a stop along the tour, in which eerie sounds will interweave with a creepy story about the building's puzzling past.

"It's not a haunted house, but there will be some little screams here and there," Gay said.

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The ghost walk is expected to run regularly on Saturday nights with tickets tentatively ranging from \$15 to \$25, depending on children and adult prices, Gay said. The tours, which will run for a little more than an hour with a restroom break, will begin at an old train station and end at Lake Dora on one of the city's water taxis. On the taxi, the tour hosts will conduct a floating séance to reach out to spirits.

"It's for fun and entertainment," said Gay, who hosted MurderWatch Mystery Theatre, a dinner theatrical production, at Disney World for a number of years before performing the shows at private events and select public settings.

Because Tavares is dubbed "America's Seaplane City," the tours probably will feature history about seaplanes.

"We're going to tie into that," Gay said.

The supernatural tours adds to a city that already has a great number of events, she said.

"The nightlife has wonderful musical entertainment, but the one cultural effect missing from Tavares is the live theater experience," she said.

The ghost tours and séances should attract more people to downtown as city leaders continue to push an initiative to increase economic development in that area.

"Anything that brings people to downtown and brings people from the outside into Tavares is a benefit for all our residents and business owners," Tavares spokeswoman Joyce Ross said. "We're real, real pleased."

Gay hopes that after select shows this summer, the production will be in full swing in time for Halloween.

If council members give the OK for tours to be held at Wooton Park, the shows will join another ghost-inspired program in Lake County.

The Mount Dora Ghost Walk has led visitors for years on a path through alleys and restaurants associated with sinister backgrounds as they are told frightening tales. The tours have expanded to offer Spanish-speaking tours and performances specifically for the visually-impaired.

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