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# Discovering the haunts of Ashmore Estates (from 'Hotspots')

Hotspots

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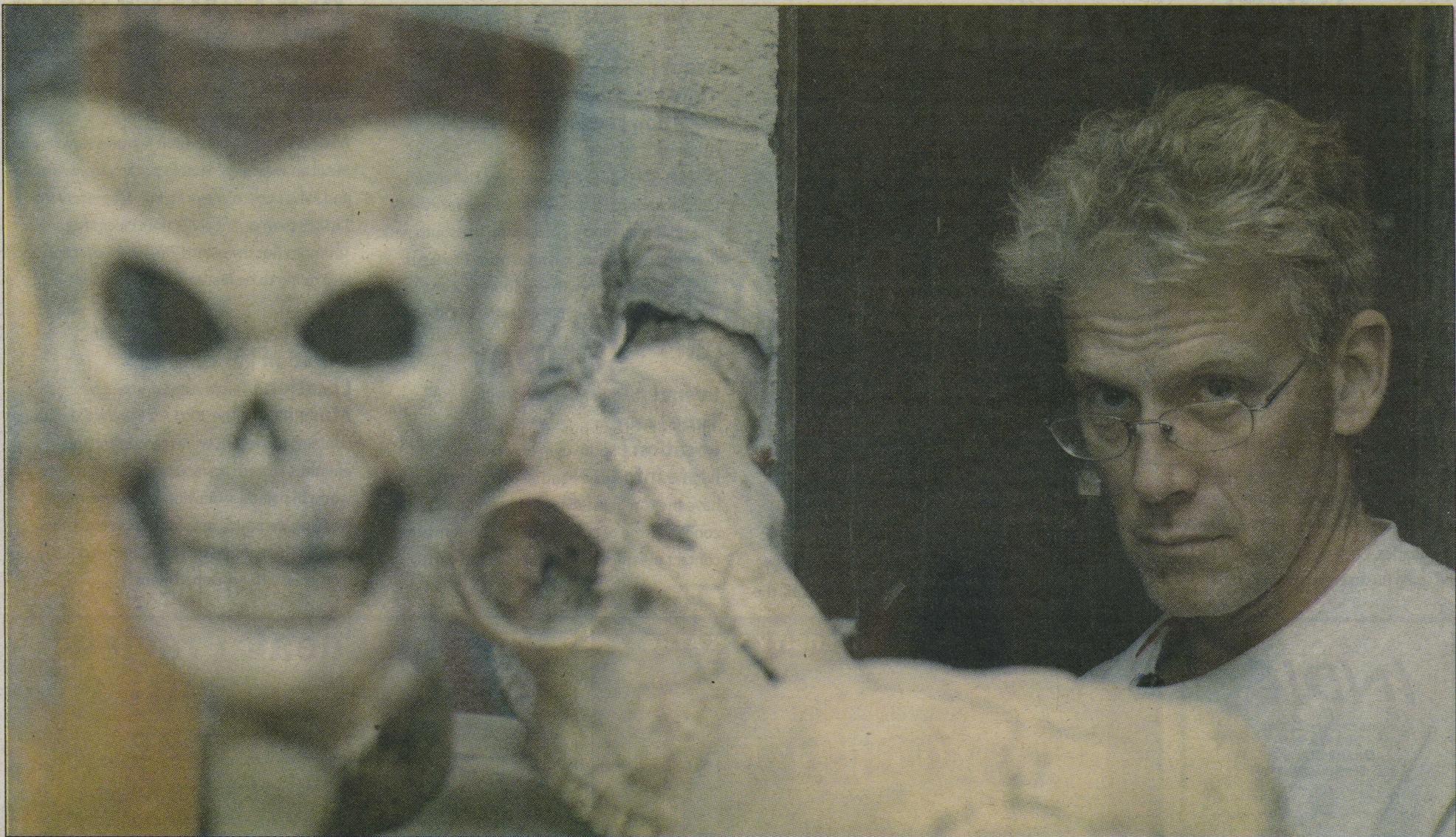
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ROBBIE WROBLEWSKI | ON THE VERGE

Spookmeister, Scott Kelley, is Ashmore Estates' current owner. Although the building had shattered windows and graffiti from intruders, Kelley still wanted to buy the building and turn it into a haunted house.

## Discovering the 'haunts' of Ashmore Estates

**The historic building with reported mysterious activity opens as a haunted house, gives flashlight tours year-round**

**By Stacy Smith**  
Senior Verge Reporter

Scott Kelley was tearing down drywall in the previously used almshouse, when he heard footsteps coming up the stairs.

He called for his wife.  
"Tanya, are you there?"  
There was no response.  
He called again.  
"Tanya?"

Kelley, the owner of Ashmore Estates, looked outside to see if anyone was around, only to find his wife standing across the yard by their mobile home.

Confused by the footsteps, Kelley asked Tanya if she was recently in the building, only to find she was around the house the entire time he was working.

The only other person it could have been was Scott's 6-year-old son, but he knew it wasn't him because he doesn't weigh enough to make such a sound.

Although Kelley said he does not think the building is haunted or believe in ghosts because of his religious faith, multiple paranormal investigators have come to Ashmore Estates and all have reported the building is haunted.

"I don't know about you, but I'm Mormon and I believe God has more of a plan for everyone instead of just sending them out to the middle of some cornfield," Kelley said.

The building's history often gets twisted into false assumptions.

In January 1915, bids were asked for the construction of a new fireproof building on the location to house between 30 and 40 people.

The building contract for the new almshouse was awarded to J.W. Montgomery in March of 1916, for \$20,389 and the cornerstone was laid on May 17, 1916, as the first poorhouse.

The poorhouse operated for more than 60 years, until thoughts regarding public welfare started to change and the building failed to be up-to-date.

In May 1979, the Illinois Department of Public Health ordered the building to be closed after finding 22 safety

code violations, but it remained open until November after a Coles County judge found improvement in renovating the violations.

In the early 1980s, the building reopened with 36 residents and was renamed Ashmore Estates, a home for the mentally and developmentally disabled.

Seven years later, the 15,000 square-foot building had been basically abandoned.

Even though the windows were shattered and walls were covered with graffiti, Kelley knew he wanted to buy the building from the previous owner and turn it into a haunted house last year.

"If people are willing to get into the building illegally, they would be willing to pay to see it," he said.

The building will be open to the public as "Ashmore Estates Undertakers Lab," from 7 to 11:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and at the same time Oct. 25-27 and Oct. 30-31.

Another feature of the building is flashlight tours, which are given at 8, 9 and 10 p.m. Monday through Saturday. The tours are \$12 per person, but aren't running from now to Nov. 6 because of the haunted house.

Kelley's wife originally did not want to buy the building, but she said they didn't have anywhere else to go.

After living near Ashmore Estates for a year, Tanya said she is happy with their decision and said she doesn't have a problem with the paranoia.

Tanya said a woman came over during sundown trying to steal irises from the building, but Tanya wouldn't let her. So, she asked the woman to take photographs instead.

Tanya said she remembers seeing a stone image of a man diving out one of the front windows on the woman's digital camera.

She described stone images as an event that's recorded in stone and sometimes comes up in photographs, and a man was reported to have dived out that window.

Tanya said she asked the woman to send her copies of the pictures, but she never heard from her again.

It was documented that about 100 people have died in the building, but only one man supposedly haunts it.

The man is Joe Bloxom, a former resident of the poorhouse, who died after getting hit by a train.

From the information the Kelleys have compiled, it is thought that Bloxom's body was dumped at the gates of the building.

Tanya said she had never seen Bloxom, but last year, two of the Ashmore Estates actors thought they saw him walking

### FAST FACTS: ASHMORE ESTATES

- **When:** 7 to 11:30 p.m. today and Saturday and the same time on Oct. 25 - 27 and Oct. 30 - 31
- **Where:** Located in Ashmore at 22645 east County Rd., west of Charleston and off of Rt. 16
- **What:** A haunted house
- **Cost:** \$13 for adults and \$10 for children under 13 years old
- **Web site:** [www.ashmoreestates.net](http://www.ashmoreestates.net)

across the room in front of them.

"We've known those actors for a long time, and they wouldn't have made something like this up," Tanya said. "The two came flying down the stairs, white as ghosts and when they described what the person looked like, it sounded like Joe."

Mike Kleen, president of Eastern's Ghost Club, has researched as well as written a short story about Ashmore Estates.

Kleen said he has never seen any paranormal activity in Ashmore Estates, but does think other people have.

"I do believe people see and hear things that can't be explained; however, I am skeptical because it happens with so many people," he said. "The brain is a very complex instrument that perceives things in the world that are very sophisticated, but not. Contractually, people don't see everything they are actually seeing."

Kleen said when writing his story, he interviewed Curt Starkey, a behavioral health therapist, who used to work in Ashmore Estates.

Kleen said when talking to Starkey, he commented that many of the workers claimed to see paranormal activity.

"If the people who worked there were saying they could see things, I'm sure there must be something there," Kleen said.

Although, Kleen recommends people visit Ashmore Estates, and is glad someone is maintaining the building, he does not think it should be used as a haunted house because of its history.

"I think people should go there because it's a part of Coles County history," he said. "But, I'm uncomfortable with it being a haunted house. People grew up and lived their lives there and now it's used for someone's entertainment. There's something just not right about that."