4th Annual Paracon a Wrap

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Paracon—FEATURE—

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The 4th Annual Paranormal Convention held this weekend in Sault Ste. Marie was as much a work conference for paranormal researchers as a coming-out-of-the-closet party for 900 like-minded spirit experts and enthusiasts.

People came to see their favorite TV stars, learn about techy electronic gadgets and pick up some really cool t-shirts.

With nearly half of all Americans owning up to a belief in ghosts, according to a February survey from the Huffington Post, the number of people attending the conference each year is growing. Top-rated TV shows that create big names in the paranormal world are fueling interest.

This year MM was one of the participants, there on assignment and she brings us this report.

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Walking into Kewadin Casinos, I wasn’t sure what to expect of a paranormal convention. Humming the theme from Ghostbusters under my breath, I opened the door and aimed myself toward a break in the crowd.

I assumed the convention must be in a different part of the building, because this area was crowded with what looked like “regular people”, holding drink cups, milling around and laughing. So I pressed on a few steps before hearing laughter and cheers coming from inside a theater. Psychic Chip Coffey was onstage fielding questions from a large audience, his comedic answers entertaining everyone. I tapped the shoulder of a young man of about 12 as he walked past. “What school do you go to?’ I whispered, assuming he was a local. “Oh, I’m from Indiana, ma’am, my parents drove up here for this.”

Tim Ellis, the event organizer says this Para-con has a large draw.

**We’re hoping between 8- and 900, which would be our largest selling crowd that we’ve ever had. We do know we have a lady here that came all the way from England to be with us this weekend. We know we need to put together an event that has some very recognizable names, some very credible people in the field and then people will make their trip here to the Sault. (:20**)

The participants it turns out, came from all walks of life: a physician’s assistant, a truck driver, the assistant head of surveillance for a well-known casino, a school board member, a waitress, a salesman.

People who are interested in the paranormal might be a sub-culture in America, but they are a sub-culture of apparently regular folks.

The people I spoke with expressed a genuine interest in discovering if there’s an afterlife. They came not only to rub elbows with the rock stars of the psychic world but to arm themselves with information.

Two women from St. Helen, in Roscommon County told me what drew them to the convention.

**Curiosity. Yeah, curiosity, we wanted to learn more, more about the spirit world and how it works. The dos and don’ts, how to be safe trying to do this stuff. (me: How to do what stuff?) How to protect yourself for if you think you see ghosts or just how to protect yourself for doing the right thing so we don’t draw the wrong ones. We’ve never been here before and we heard about it and we just wanted to come check it out for ourselves and see how it does work and so far yeah, I’m impressed. (:31)**

The convention sold books, crystals and t-shirts along with head-mounted flashlights for seeing tools in the dark, electromagnetic field detectors, and audio recorders. The gadgets are meant to aid those who don’t have psychic abilities.

Psychic and radio host Rev. Tim Shaw believes the high-tech tools bring validation to the psychic field.

**Spritualism is so immersed in frauds. The 1920s, they call it the Golden Age, it was terrible. Being a medium was a huge huge thing for women. Mediumship was a way for them to make money and even though they may have started off with the best of intentions, to have to go and produce night after night in order to make money, often goes and leads to fraud. The big thing is now you don’t do anything in the dark, you have witnesses at all times. I have IR cameras on us and that’s why I love it. Skeptics keep my field honest. (:41)**

Rev. Shaw walked me through the crowd, pointing out black t-shirted clusters of paranormal researchers. He scanned the crowd to find one of his favorite mentors, Haunted Collector host and demonologist John Zaffis. Zaffis says he believes TV shows and the internet have broken down barriers and taboos for many people. He says he’s amazed by the good questions young people ask him.

**Those boundaries of anything being taboo with a person reaching out for help or a person wanting to understand something – those barriers are now gone. (ME Are there different types of people now, and what kind of people do you see gathered here?) All kinds. Young, old, in-between, people that are curious, people that are trying to understand the supernatural. I mean, it’s just, right across the board. The one thing each and every one of us has in common is we want answers to what happens after we leave the physical body. We all want to know exactly what happens once we die. And that’s something we all strive for and we’re all trying to figure out.. (:39)**

And those average people I saw when I arrived – maybe half of them were paranormal researchers. It’s part of a burgeoning cottage industry, at least in Michigan. The teams gathered at the conference to network and share information before returning to their day jobs on Monday. I stopped and talked with Mark Briones of Dearborn and John Kennedy of Sault Ste. Marie. Reaching into the pocket of his cargo pants, Mark Briones pulls out his business card.

**I’m also one of the cofounders of the Michigan Paranormal Association. We have about 12 or 13 different groups that we share not only manpower, equipment, theory. If I can help one person, put their mind at ease, that’s all the payment that my team requires. It makes us feel good to help one person, especially when there’s children involved in an investigation, that goes right to the top of the list. Children should not be afraid to be in their own home. (:32) paracon—3--**

Attendance at the Michigan Paranormal Conference grows each year. Ellis is already planning on the 5th Annual conference for the second weekend in August next year. Demand for psychic Chip Coffey has led to him returning to Kewadin Casinos in February for another performance and gallery readings. It doesn’t take a crystal ball to see that people enjoy coming to see what psychics have to say.

SOQ

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