

# Focus

A Conversation with ...

## The 'haunted' Vernon Inn's keepers

Herald Staff Writer Jeanette Calo recently visited the Vernon Inn to investigate rumors of ghostly activity at the restaurant. Two of the owners, Dan and Diane O'Keefe, shared what it's like to work with ghosts.

**Question:** Would you say there is ghostly activity in the restaurant?

**Diane:** Yes, but there's not as much as there used to be. It's been pretty quiet. No one has actually said that they've heard anything or seen anything. Sometimes when I was upstairs in the morning during the summer I would hear footsteps coming up, or the gate swinging when I was the only one here.

**Dan:** There was a lot of activity in the (19)80s. I bartended here at the old place for a long time, and there was a lot of activity. Doors opened and closed, and you'd always feel that cold breeze and that presence around you.

**Diane:** And you would see something go by in the corner of your eye.

**Dan:** It's weird. ... You catch it in the corner of your eye, and you're like, "What is that?" If there's a lot of people here, you don't feel it. When there might be two of you here or you're by yourself early in the morning, (then you hear things) ... all of a sudden the bathroom door will swing open and close, and there's no one around.

**Q. So you were aware of this before you purchased this place?**

**Dan:** Yeah, it never bothered us. They're friendly ghosts, (like) Casper.

**Q. Have you ever seen an apparition of a person?**

**Dan:** Yes. Its clothes were from the 1920s. It was a greenish, full-length outfit. And it came from this door (courtyard) and went that way (toward the "Employees Only" section). It was tall, like 6 feet tall. It just went across the room and we were closed. It was me, a bartender and (another person), and the bartender looked and saw him, and we turned around and saw it. And I ran after it because I thought there was someone in the building, and it was gone. Totally gone.

**Q. Did that freak you out?**

**Dan:** Nope, they don't bother me. They don't bother anybody, so leave them alone. If they bothered me, that would be a problem. I probably wouldn't be here.

**Q. Do you know who that ghost was?**

**Dan:** People say that it's the ghost of the previous owner, Pat Curry, who owned the place in the (19)40s. Everyone says it's Pat Curry.

**Q. So, if it was the owner, does it ever freak you out that your spirit might be roaming this place after you die?**

**Dan:** Umm, no, not really. But it's true that every owner who's ever owned this place is dead. I never thought about it that way.



Photos by Claire Sheprow/NJH

Welcome to the Vernon Inn, where it is said the beer at right isn't the only collection of spirits in the restaurant. Diane and Dan O'Keefe, in the photo below at left, say they've heard from one or more ghosts in their two years as co-owners.



Diane and Dan O'Keefe, shown above in the basement of the Vernon Inn, say they peacefully coexist with ghosts. Below, in the back of the inn's basement, a long and narrow corridor opens to an unfinished space filled with cobwebs and possible paranormal activity.



**Q. So if you could say anything to Curry's ghost, what would it be?**

**Dan:** Why didn't you maintain the building?

**Q. Did you give the ghost a name?**

**Diane:** No, but when the paranormals (North Jersey Paranormal Research) came in, they heard a little girl's voice ... saying "Be quiet" and "Hey." This place has been around since the 1800s. Many people have died here that you don't know about ... from a fire and from fever in 1919.

(Mark Johnson, researcher for North Jersey Paranormal Research) even found out that some little boy died here of that (fever).

**Dan:** There could be four or five ghosts in here and you wouldn't know ... The paranormals had a field day with this place. They came in like 4 in the morning, they had motion sensors, cameras.

**Q. So what made you call them?**

**Diane:** Mark actually  
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This staircase leads to the basement of the Vernon Inn, where some employees won't go for fear of paranormal activity.

### Co-owners have an 'inn' with ghosts

**Names:** Dan and Diane O'Keefe

**Occupation:** Co-owners of the Vernon Inn since 2003

**Family:** Two daughters, Nicole, 12, and Jessica, 7

**Why they were interviewed:** With Halloween a day away, it seemed like a good time to chat with the co-owners of a restaurant known for supernatural activity. North Jersey Paranormal Research visited the inn twice last year, reporting a child's voice where no children were present in February and "several 'hot spots' for orb activity" in October.

**About this feature:** Conversations with ... is always looking for newsmakers, those who make things happen and just plain interesting people in Sussex County. Contact Joe Hainthaler, night editor, The New Jersey Herald, 2 Spring St., Newton, N.J. 07860; e-mail: jhainthaler@njherald.com.

### — THE — PULSE of Sussex County

RESIDENTS ON THE ISSUES

## Do things go bump in the county?

Most residents say ghosts do not exist

By JEANETTE CALO  
Herald Staff Writer

Will fears of ghosts be haunting county residents' minds this Halloween? Not according to the latest Pulse of Sussex County, which found that less than a third believe in them.

And of the 28 percent of respondents who acknowledge their existence, less than a third said they had ever seen a ghost, according to the poll of 313 residents conducted by Sussex County Community College in partnership with The New Jersey Herald.

Local religious leaders share the majority opinion.

The Rev. Thomas Diamond, pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Newton, said his church does not accept the idea of ghosts.

"When spirits die, they're raised up to heaven or condemned to hell," he said. "They're not roaming."

If a family came expressing fear of evil spirits in their home, the church would

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Photo courtesy of Kathleen Nosti

Dylan Nosti, a 22-month-old Newton resident, looks into his family's just-completed jack-o'-lantern.

## Most believe Halloween's wholesome

Poll: Southern Christians fear masked paganism

By THOMAS HARGROVE and GUIDO H. STEMPEL III  
Scripps Howard News Service

Halloween is unevenly practiced in America — celebrated by Roman Catholics in the Northeast, but frowned on by evangelical Christians in the South, according to a Scripps Howard News Service survey.

Trick-or-treating is especially welcomed in heavily Roman Catholic neighborhoods in the Northeast, home of the Irish immigrants who introduced their ancient, pagan-inspired festival to the New World 150 years ago.

Halloween is least welcomed, or even observed, in Southern states, where evangelical Christians are becoming increasingly worried about growing secularism and the resurgence of paganism in popular culture.

A survey of 1,005 adult residents of the United States conducted by the Scripps

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