

GHOSTLY TALES



Big Al Capone's in Pipe reports haunted happenings

By Heather Stanek

The Reporter
hstanek@fdlreporter.com

PIPE — Shaking chairs, a whiff of heavy perfume and a door opening are some of the stranger occurrences at Big Al Capone's.

The bar and restaurant located at Highway 151 and County Trunk W in the small community of Pipe near Lake Winnebago's east shore is purported to be haunted, though who's doing the haunting remains a mystery.

Paranormal investigators have taken recent interest in the site. Fox Valley Ghost Hunters spent Sunday evening, Oct. 30, at Big Al Capone's, and Curt Strutz of TV's "Paranormal Generation" told The Reporter that the show plans to film there in December.

One of the ghosts may be an unknown woman who tragically died there at some point in the building's 165-year history, said manager Anna Thomas. Locals believe the woman jumped or was pushed out of a third-story window.

Thomas thinks one of the ghosts is feminine due to the scent of intense, old-fashioned floral perfume that she sometimes smells in the bar area and women's bathroom. No one within range was wearing a similar fragrance when she smelled it.

Employees and customers have also seen the women's bathroom door in the bar area open by itself, she said.

Occurrences

Strange things have happened in her second floor office, said Thomas. The most common occurrence involves her desk chair. Sometimes, when she's sitting down, it feels as though someone grabs the chair's legs and shakes them back and forth.

"I definitely felt it move," she said.

See **CAPONE'S** Page A6



ABOVE: The exterior of Big Al Capone's bar and restaurant on Highway 151 at County Trunk W in Pipe. (Patrick Flood photos /The Reporter)

TOP: A bullet-riddled car, a gangster dummy and other odds and ends decorate the interior of Big Al Capone's in Pipe. The bar and restaurant has been investigated for paranormal activity by Fox Valley Ghost Hunters and TV's "Paranormal Generation" plans to film there in December.

MIDDLE: Anna Thomas, Big Al Capone's bar and restaurant manager, in the upper floor of the building. Legend has it that a woman tragically died by jumping or being pushed from a third-story window of the building.

GHOSTLY TALES

PAGE A6 The Reporter, Monday, October 31, 2011

Capone's

Continued from Page A1

Local residents and owners have reported strange phenomena in the past. When the building sat vacant, curtains on the third floor would open and close by themselves and lights would turn on without explanation, she said.

Co-owner John Schmitz didn't put much stock in the stories when he and his wife, Annie, bought the building in spring of 2010. He said local residents spoke of a woman in Western garb appearing in the bar and window, and lights turning on by themselves.

"There were so many stories, I kind of blew them off," he said.

His mind changed over coffee one morning. Schmitz and an employee were watching the morning news at the bar at about 6 a.m. and planning the day ahead when they heard a loud crash in the kitchen. They found a 16-inch pizza pan on the floor, 8 feet from the pan stack. Schmitz said the pans are "interlocked like poker chips" when stacked, so they wouldn't move, even if an employee bumped them. There was no one else in the building who could have thrown the pan, he said.

Others have reported unusual incidents. Schmitz said a cleaner's mop bucket rolled across the floor, and he couldn't move it back when he tried. One sober customer swore his beer flew off the bar.

"Things happen around there, and I can't explain it," he said. "I do believe there is something going on there."

Third floor

The third floor is the eeriest part of the building, Thomas believes. With no electricity or rooms — just wooden beams and floorboards — it resembles an old, dark attic. Only floor-



The interior of Big Al Capone's restaurant on Highway 151 north in Pipe. The bar and restaurant is purportedly haunted. (Patrick Flood/The Reporter)

to-ceiling windows provide light.

It was here that Thomas and a member of Fox Valley Ghost Hunters had a paranormal encounter. Thomas said the investigator visited in mid-October to take preliminary readings before the team stayed on Sunday. Using recording equipment, the investigator asked the ghosts several questions. A man's voice replied through the recorder. He said he was 36 years old, but declined to give his name.

The ghost was asked to make a noise, and the question was followed by a crashing sound in the southeast corner. When she and the investigator went to the corner and asked questions again, the man's voice said "Leave, get out."

"(The investigator) asked, 'Who died up here?'" Thomas said. "The voice said, 'Us.'"

More sensitive recording technology detected another voice, Thomas said. It was a woman saying "Please, don't leave." Recorders captured the woman's name, but Thomas declined to reveal it because Big Al Capone's is holding a contest to see if anyone can guess it.

Unafraid

Thomas has never felt threatened by the building's otherworldly tenants.

"It's kind of creepy," she said, "but through all the little things, I'm not scared."

The building has a long history, Thomas said, which may contribute to its present paranormal state. It started in 1846 as Fuhrman's Hotel, a stagecoach stop for travelers, according to Big Al Capone's website, www.caponesofpipe.com.

The first floor had a dining room and kitchen, a bar for men and an ice cream parlor for women. The second and third floors had 22 rooms for rent.

In the 1920s, famous gangster Al Capone supposedly stayed there frequently while visiting his brother at a local brothel and distillery a few miles away. This legend gave Capone's its name. The restaurant was known as Capone's before the Schmitzes changed it to Big Al Capone's once they took charge.

They made renovations, including a new kitchen and windows, and additional seating. They expanded the menu and parking. The second floor is being converted to apartments, but Schmitz said there's one area he won't touch.

"As the owner, I'm leaving the third floor open to the ghosts. The next owner can decide whether or not to turn it into apartments," he said.