

WHO YOU GONNA CALL?



PARANORMAL ACTIVITY: When Dawn Mahoney of Winthrop, above, thought her house was haunted, she looked to ghost hunters including Sharon Koogler, below right and below, and Ellen MacNeil Campbell, below left.



By JESSICA FARGEN

Ghosts and haunted houses aren't just for Halloween whimsy for some New Englanders, who have turned to ghost hunters to find out if something from the other side is living beside them.

"We're not afraid of these situations," said Sharon Koogler, a member of Supernatural, Paranormal, Investigations, Research, Intuitive, Truth Society of New England, or SPIRITS, an eight-member group that has investigated 20 homes since forming in January.

"We help people who are afraid or don't understand. We can go in and find out what's going on," she said. "Sometimes

people want to know, 'Am I crazy or is there something going on?'"

By day, Koogler and member Ellen MacNeil Campbell work as administrative assistants at Brigham and Women's Hospital. By night, they arm themselves with digital recorders, electromagnetic field detectors and K2 meters, which help detect energy disturbances.

Members attended a two-day Paranormal Boot Camp, put on by the Rhode Island-based Atlantic Paranormal Society. Their free investigations first assess logical explanations for activity such as settling or creaky floors.

"A lot of times people will say, 'I feel like somebody's watching me in my basement,'" said Campbell, 56, of Winthrop. "What you have is underground wires giving off electromagnetic

fields. When it's powerful it makes you feel paranoid, nauseous, light-headed."

Other times, there's something more, she said.

A real haunted house?

"My house is very much haunted," said Dawn Mahoney, 60, an artist whose 1886 Winthrop home has been investigated three times.

She's seen unexplained lights in a hallway. A potato peeler once sprung from the sink. A comb levitated. SPIRITS, which detected "disembodied voices" during one night at Mahoney's home, validated what she already believed.

"This is all true stuff. I'm a very skeptical person. You gotta show me this stuff," Mahoney said.

The voices, which Campbell said responded to questions from the investigation team, were on a different frequency and could

only be heard when a recording was played back, Campbell said.

Campbell said their work seeks to determine fact from fiction.

"Unless you have a photo or you recorded it, it's just a wonderful story," she said.

Frank Follett asked Campbell to check out his rented 1840 home in Norfolk, Conn., suspecting paranormal activity after a picture and shell fell off a wall.

"We've been hearing footsteps in parts of the house where there's nobody there," said Follett, 44.

Campbell said the group recorded a woman's voice in the basement this month. "It was very distinct. It said, 'You go home now,'" Campbell recalled. Follett said he feels better.

"It validates what is going on and what isn't going on," he said.

Much skepticism

Ghosts aren't real, said Pat Linea of the Los Angeles Skeptics Society, which debunks such science and history myths as the "undead" and haunted houses. "There aren't any ghosts," she said. "People who don't believe in ghosts aren't bothered by them."

Ghosts and hauntings can be explained away by hallucinations and old homes, she said. Many are influenced by movies and books.

"A ghost is just something conjured up by the culture and individuals," she said. Movies are one among the biggest culprits, she said, and "vulnerable" people mistake them as reality.



Information: spiritsofnewengland.org. The group includes Becky Gann, Terri Jamros and Sarah Campbell of Massachusetts; Jack Kenna of New York; Lori Miars and Kathy Anderson of Virginia.