

Halloween Queen

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Scaring people is a passion for this Drake alum.

Amber Arnett-Bequeaith, GR'03, isn't afraid of anything.

Spiders, snakes, heights, failure ... none of the common—or uncommon—phobias even phase her. But given that she lives and works at the Edge of Hell and spent her childhood lounging in a coffin as part of the family business, this is probably not surprising.

“I don't scare easily,” says Arnett-Bequeaith, vice president of Full Moon Productions in Kansas City. “It's always the goal of my staff and volunteers to scare me. Sometimes if someone is really good they can kind of startle me. But it really just doesn't happen.”

In addition to running four nationally acclaimed haunted houses, a ghost and gangster tour, and ghost hunting excursions, Arnett-Bequeaith is also organizing a tour of Civil War spots in Kansas City. Beyond that she is also the national spokesperson for America Haunts, an organization that represents the best Halloween attractions in the country.

Basically she is the only person for Halloween. And there is no one more qualified

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The Psychology of Fear

As a five-year-old, Arnett-Bequeaith worked at the original [Edge of Hell](#) haunted house, created by her great-grandfather in 1975. Her job was to lie in a coffin, sit up slowly, and drop rose petals on the heads of visitors. As the night ended and the family was closing up shop, she would simply lie down in the coffin and sleep until it was time to go home.

Since then, the thrill and joy of scaring others has never left her.

After earning a master's degree in marketing and integrated communications and public relations from Drake in 2003, Arnett-Bequeaith stayed in Iowa and worked in marketing for Hy-Vee for four years.

Ultimately, however, the family business called her back. She returned to Kansas City to take the reins of the company in 2009. In addition to the original Edge of Hell, Full Moon Productions runs three other haunted attractions: [The Beast](#), the largest haunted house in the country; the [Chambers of Edgar Allen Poe](#); and the [Macabre Cinema](#). All take the art—and science—of scaring people to a new level.

“People don’t really understand what goes into this,” she says. “Each attraction and scene is built on the psychology of fear.”

For instance, visitors to the Macabre Cinema find themselves in a haunted 1930s theater where the smell of popcorn wafts through the air as they become the victim on the movie set.

“We’re not about gore and blood,” she says. “Each attraction has true antiques in the sets, and that really transports the person to another place and time.”

The company also keeps a trainer on staff to work with the many live animals incorporated into the attractions. The headless horseman sits atop a real horse, live alligators snap at the heels of visitors, and live snakes—including [Medusa, at 25 feet 2 inches, the largest reticulated python in captivity in the world](#)—slither underfoot.

In [The Beast](#), visitors are forced to find their own way through a thunderstorm on the cobblestone streets of Jack the Ripper’s London, through a deadly, alligator-filled swamp, and a disorienting maze. For those who

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don't make it out in time, a pack of werewolves is released to chase visitors out through a heart-wrenching, four-story slide to freedom.

"Scaring is not easy. It's all in the timing," she says. "It's all about how to put a twist on the experience."

Beyond the Ghosts

Not all the work Arnett-Bequeaith does is creepy, however. Her company also owns 14 buildings that it leases for commercial space and is working diligently to help revitalize the [West Bottoms](#) area of Kansas City.

"We've worked for a lot of years on infrastructure and worked directly with the mayor to get funding. We're seeing real progress there," she says.

The area currently has about 25 antique stores and boutiques and continues to develop.

Full Moon's attractions, long recognized as among the top haunted attractions in the country, are also gaining attention in other circles. The Beast is the location for a feature film currently in production and there has been talk of a reality TV show based around the business and Arnett-Bequeaith's role.

Despite the haunted houses and ghost hunts that make up such a large part of her life, Arnett-Bequeaith says she's not a believer in the supernatural.

"My family started this when I was five years old," she explains. "I create ghosts. You cannot be in this position and get the heebie jeebies every time something strange happens."

So what does a woman who runs the Edge of Hell do to unwind when she's had a rough day?

For one, she does not watch scary movies. She's never seen Nightmare on Elm Street, Friday the 13th, or any of the other well-known films from the horror genre. But then, why would she? Arnett-Bequeaith sees this sort of thing every day.

"When you're having a bad day, there's nothing better than going to the control room and watching the monitors," she says. "There are cameras everywhere that capture reactions of guests. You laugh so hard you cry."

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