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## Spectacular Spooks: Blue Valley family owns four haunted houses downtown, maintains year-round Beau Savannah

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Your senses are being tested to the very point in which you won't know if you're in Heaven or on the Edge of Hell. Surrounded by utter darkness, with nothing but blood-thirsty savages in the same room, and you will experience a face-to-face encounter with The Beast. One might even be buried alive in the Chambers of Poe. All those avid theatre fans have the opportunity to star live in a horror film in the haunted Macabre Cinema.

These four haunted houses, located in the West

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Bottoms, are owned by a Blue Valley family, the Bequeaiths.

The houses open the last weekend in August and close the first weekend of November.

Senior **Savannah Bequeaith** said her family is very passionate about the creative and dramatic aspects of the houses.

“It’s really hard to put together, and we take pride in the hard work that we do,” she said. “It’s really hard on my mom because she works all the time in the fall. That takes away from some family time we might have had otherwise.”

Savannah said it takes a lot of coordination between the painters and carpenters to get the house ready for the season.

“It’s really intense,” Savannah said. “They are permanent sets, so we obviously change them from time-to-time. At the beginning of the summer, we go through the houses and take notes like, ‘Oh, this wall needs to be repainted,’ or, ‘Oh, this set needs to be fixed.’”

Sophomore **Beau Bequeaith** said the haunted houses are the scariest in the nation.

Beau said his favorite parts of his family owning the haunted houses is skipping the line, getting in for free and having everyone ask him for tickets.

The haunted houses employ 15 full-time workers, over 300 part-time, seasonal workers and 125 volunteer workers. They get paid anywhere from \$7.25 to \$10.00 per hour, depending on the job.

Haunted house Vice President and mother of Savannah and Beau, **Amber Arnette-Bequeaith** said even when the Halloween season ends, they still have a lot of work to do.

“Two of our main attractions benefit a charity, the Dream Factory,” she said. “We have a little party with the Dream Factory, and we have to take care of our employees, so payroll has to be completed. We go into renovations and completely prepare for winter. That usually takes us into Christmas, and, in January, we start it all over again.”

Arnette-Bequeaith said the task is a major undertaking.

“We work all year because it isn’t something that’s just like a checklist,” she said. “You work on scenes and new ideas, and there is always new technology and props. We then go into company training and expectations, costume fittings, and we hire a makeup artist and set designer.”

Beau said in order to have the haunted houses reach their full potential, they attempt to re-envision a new set.

“Usually we pick a day and one of the houses to look at everything,” Beau said. “You have to go through and

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clean up everything and decide where you want new pieces and what pieces you want to take out. We still have year-round things, but we just focus on the next year.”

Savannah said it is a big time commitment to own the houses.

“During the season, my mom still works all day making sure everything is running smoothly, coordinating the media and coordinating all the actors,” Savannah said. “I usually go into work around 6 [p.m.], and the haunted houses open at 7:30, and they’re open until there is no line. We usually get home from like 2-3:30 in the morning.”

To ensure safety, Amber said each attraction is equipped with safety buttons for employees to push if a situation occurs, and a manager will arrive on scene within seconds. In addition to safety buttons, cameras run through each room, so managers can watch guests in the entire attraction.

“It is a haunted house, so you enter at your own risk,” Arnette-Bequeaith said. “Yes, there is the possibility of you being touched. All the warning signs are posted when you walk in. If someone has a broken arm and they want to go in, they specifically have to sign a waiver for safety reasons.”

Savannah said she always has stories to tell of her experiences working at the houses.

“Some lady literally peed her pants walking up the stairs,” she said. “She wasn’t even in the haunted house yet — she was just walking up the stairs, and she very visibly peed her pants. That was a first.”



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