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Big Easy's House of Shock more than guts, gore

Worldwide, haunted-attraction industry pulls in \$2 billion each year

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By MARY FOSTER

Associated Press

updated 9/27/2011 5:29:20 PM ET

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NEW ORLEANS — Ross Karpelman smiled happily as he looked over his huge collection of bloody body parts, large rats, dangling cobwebs and tools for cutting, slashing and



sawing.

Karpelman, who with two childhood buddies built a haunted house called House of Shock, has seen it grow from the likes of peeled grapes for eyeballs and cold spaghetti for worms into an attraction that's visited by 25,000 people annually and rated one of the best of its kind.

"None of us can believe it's grown like this," said Karpelman, referring to his friends and business partners Jay Gracianette and Steve Joseph. "We had all done haunted houses in our back yards as kids and remembered how much fun it was. We just wanted to have that kind of fun again."

Halloween-season attractions like House of Shock are big business. Ranging from haunted houses to former prisons to amusement parks and even farms with haunted barns and hayrides, the haunted attraction industry is worth \$2 billion in two dozen countries worldwide, according to Larry Kirchner, editor of Hauntworld magazine. More than 4,000 attractions are listed on the magazine's website.

"People love Halloween," Kirchner said. "It's not a holiday you have to participate in, it's a holiday you want to participate in."

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Sea to haunted sea

Fans pay between \$20 and \$50 or more to visit attractions that include such varied venues as the Queen Mary, the storied cruise ship now docked in Long Beach, Calif., which gets a makeover to host haunted evenings, and Ruby Falls in Chattanooga, Tenn., a natural underground waterfall that becomes a haunted cavern. There are haunted casinos and cornfields. In Salem, Ore., the Oregon School for the Deaf hosts a haunted house called the Nightmare Factory each year as a fundraiser for the school.



Gerald Herbert / AP

An actor in costume and makeup poses in her setting at the House of Shock, a haunted house, in New Orleans. Halloween-season attractions like House of Shock are big business.

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What was once a backyard attraction, or something set up by a local group looking to raise money, has become a festival of fright that often stretches from September to November. At House of Shock, which runs Fridays and Saturdays from Sept. 30 to Nov. 5, with a six-day straight run over the weekend leading up to Halloween, visitors pay \$25 (\$50 to jump the line) and spend 45 minutes to an hour or more going through the graveyards, butcher shops, swamps and cult church of the "House." Many spend hours more outside enjoying the free show, the freaks and the bar and food stand.

Amber Arnett-Bequeaith's grandmother started a haunted house business 37 years ago in Kansas City. The attraction then, which was more like a theater show, was a world away from The Beast and Edge of Hell attractions the family operates now, she said.

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"I remember as a little girl picking up any bones I could find out in a pasture for props," she said. "Today it's all about technology, sounds, sights even the infusion of smells. It's a full sensory stimulation. I'm amazed at how computers have taken over."

'I do' ... for eternity

"We work with people's fears and phobias," she added. "But it's a safe scare. It's what people are attracted to on Halloween — fun and excitement."

Arnett-Bequeaith even features a wedding package at Edge of Hell, with one to six actual weddings performed there each year.

Edward Terebus has been in the haunted attraction business for 32 years and he also credits technology for many of the scares in his Erebus Haunted House in Pontiac, Mich. Computers control sounds, floor mats, puppets, animatronics, and other props. But the show is frequently revamped.

"A haunted attraction is similar to a Broadway performance," Terebus said. "The show runs and then it shuts down, redecorates, and opens up with a fresh show."

Although House of Shock uses some technological elements, it bucks the trend by relying on live actors for many of its theme driven rooms.

"We have more than 350 volunteers that love Halloween and the chance to scare someone," Karpelman said.

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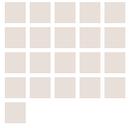
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