

Nevada embraces its paranormal tourist treasures

By Anne Knowles

MINDEN –“We’re sitting in a haunted building.”

That’s how Janet Jones began her talk on paranormal tourism Thursday at Rural Roundup, the Nevada Division of Tourism’s annual conference.

“There’s an older man and woman and I suspect they’re the original owners,” Jones said, referring to the Brick House near the Carson Valley Inn where the breakout session was conducted. “She’s warm and welcoming, but he wants to know why there’s all these people here. But they’re fine. They’re just curious.”

Jones, a ghost tour operator who says she is also a psychic, was speaking to a crowded, overflow room of attendees, some anxious to learn how to turn local legends into live heads in beds, but most just eager to hear more tales of eerie apparitions.

Maybe Jones should have known she’d need a bigger room.



The Thunderbird Lodge in Incline is said to be haunted. Photo/LTN file

Jones, who worked with the Carson City Visitors Bureau for 18 years, conducts public tours and private events in local haunts, including dinners at the Mackay Mansion and overnights at St. Mary's Art Center, both in Virginia City.

"We do an elegant dinner with Champagne. We dress in costume, eat at the original dining room table, on china. We use candles, no electric lights,"said Jones, talking about the one-time home of silver mining magnate John Williams Mackay. "Everyone brings a camera and when the ghosts come in the room, I let them know so they can take pictures."

Jones rents out St. Mary's for the night and hosts potluck dinners and sleepovers.

"Every room has a ghost,"she said.

But it can be less hospitable than the mansion, and sometimes more thrilling.

"I've been chased out of there three times,"said Jones.

The building once housed a hospital run by nuns, some of who allegedly hang around still.

"There's Sister Regina,"she said. "I always say something to make her mad."

Jones also hosts local ghost walks through the Stewart Indian School compound in Carson City, a boarding school where Native American children throughout the West were forced to live. The school operated for nearly a century, from 1890 to 1980.

"It is probably one of the most haunted places in Carson City and can be scary,"she said.

Jones often sees shadow people –a human figure appearing as a shadow –at the school and the spirits of children in a field long-rumored to be an unmarked cemetery.

“They bulldozed it and there’s no sagebrush, no place for the children to hide,”said Jones. “It broke my heart.”

Jones backed up her stories with a slideshow of photographs showing mysterious figures in places she tours, including Mackay Mansion and Stewart Indian School, as well as places she’s visited, such as Gettysburg, Pa., the Civil War site overrun with history and phantoms, where Jones photographed what she said is a shadow soldier.

“It’s like Disneyland to me,”said Jones.

Nevada is filled with places possessed by the dead, claims Jones –from the Mizpah Hotel in Tonopah to the Cal Neva Lodge and Casino straddling Nevada and California at the North Shore, and Thunderbird Lodge in Incline Village.

In fact, Jones said there’s a business opportunity for a smart tour operator to run a Nevada-wide ghost tour, shuttling guests from one haunted hotel or site to the next across the state.

Jones told her listeners April 16 that the audience for ghost tours is all ages and broad, covering those who want a light, somewhat humorous tour like the Carson City Ghost Walk operated by actress Mary Bennett, who runs Reno’s Bruka Theater, to people who want more of an “experience.”

And every municipality, she promised, has some supernatural attraction it can capitalize on to pull in visitors.

“Every town has a ghost,”she said. “There are haunted places in every, single city.”