

Spirits of Barnard Park under investigation

Paranormal detectives to be at park twice in late July

Jeff Forward - Jul 6, 2023

Halloween may still be almost four months away, but the hunt for spirits and ghosts that have reportedly haunted Fremont's Barnard Park for the past 140 years will take place on two nights in late July.

The Rev. Dave Christensen, director of Phantasm Paranormal, said his group of spiritual and otherworldly phenomenon detectives have visited Barnard Park once — on June 24 — and after detecting what he claims are spirits of seven people in the park, will be returning on two nights for further probing.

“We went on June 24 and a woman's spirit told us there are seven spirits in the park, including the spirit of a little boy. One of the spirits is named ‘Ted’ and there are some women spirits and the child,” Christensen said in a telephone interview with the Tribune.

Now, the Nickerson-based paranormal explorers will be back, Christensen said, on the nights of Thursday, July 22, and Thursday, July 29. The exploration of spirits alleged to be residing in the park begins at 9 p.m. each evening, but Christensen said onlookers or bystanders are asked to not come to the park during the investigation.

Christensen said the park is normally closed after dark per city regulations, but his group has received special permission from the City of Fremont to conduct the nighttime detective work — which involves high-tech audio recording devices and cameras than can film in the dark.

Residents are asked to not interfere with the probes on the two nights, Christensen added, because of the potential issues that he said disrespectful people can cause.

“(Spirits) can get angry. When you go to a location, you show respect. Some people make jokes about the spirits, and that can make them upset,” he explained. “Also, things can happen. A lot of times, we've had (our investigators) pushed, scratched, bit and hit (by spirits).”

Barnard Park, located off Clarkson Street and Military Avenue a few blocks from both Midland University and the City of Fremont Municipal Building, has long had a local and statewide reputation as being very haunted.

The park was the city's first cemetery in the late 1800s, but due to the growth of Fremont in the 1880s, the cemetery wasn't able to be expanded. That led city officials at the time to exhume the graves of those buried there and relocate them to the newly created Ridge Cemetery, which still exists as the city's primary burial ground.

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Nate Schwanke, who works for the City of Fremont Parks and Recreation Department, said anyone who is a native of Fremont or grew up in the city is aware of Barnard Park's spooky reputation.

"There have always been reports of it being haunted," Schwanke said. "Growing up and through high school, you'd hear stuff (about ghosts)."

What has led to the haunting of the park by numerous spirits, Christensen claims, were reports that seven bodies that were not dug up and moved. The spirits of those deceased people are what resides in the park, he added.

"Some of the neighbors (of Barnard Park) got a hold of us and said they had witnessed stuff in the night ... people walking around and also hearing voices," Christensen said of how his group came to probe the city park in Fremont. "But, they didn't see anyone."

Christensen and members of his 14-person paranormal investigation team came to the park on the night of June 24, and he said, were able to meet and interact with the spirits present.

"We talk to them," he claimed. "They open up to us."

Now 68, Christensen is a reverend, but currently not affiliated with a particular church. A 13-year veteran of the U.S. Army, he said he became interested in the paranormal and spirits following the deaths of several close relatives.

"I lost my dad when I was 25 and I lost my mom in 1995 and my wife in 1995," he said. "I heard you could take pictures of spirits and make audio recordings. I did some research on the internet how to do that and started (Phantasm Paranormal)."

The non-profit entity has been in existence for 28 years, and has grown in both the number of team members, he said, but also the number of investigations they conduct. According to the group's website, the team has probed the supernatural and spirits of many haunted locations.

"We investigated the ax murders of the Villisca, Iowa, Ax Murder House, and we were the first investigators to discover who did the murders," Christensen said. "We were the first to investigate Ball Cemetery in Sarpy County ... that place is extremely haunted."

The group said while they do not want bystanders or onlookers to interfere with their probes on the evenings of July 22 and July 24, they do allow interested people to apply to do a "ride-along" with the team on some paranormal investigations. For more information, check out their website or send an email to Christensen.

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