



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WANNA HEAR A SCARY STORY?

Uniontown, PA – Don't use the restroom alone – at least, not at the Connellsville Area Community Center.

Rev. Gina Ronzio specifically avoids the third-floor women's restroom when working in the East Fairview Avenue building.

"That bathroom is really frightening for me, and I don't get scared easily. When the energy is super heavy, I'll use the men's room down the hall, if I have to. It's unnerving," Ronzio said. "The whole place is truly alive with energy."

Ronzio, a Doctor of Naturopathy (ND), operates the Dr. Lillian Ronzio School of Holistic Health in Bullskin Township. Named for her mother – a revered herbalist and owner of the Natural Way in Connellsville – Ronzio's school aims to empower students to connect with their minds, bodies, spirits and the world around them through natural and metaphysical practices.

Some of Ronzio's most popular courses include intuitive development, psychometry, auras, connecting with past lives, mediumship and Ghost Hunting 101. The latter course involves paranormal investigations at local cemeteries and other haunted places – like the community center. In 2021, it was there that she came face-to-face with her first full-bodied apparition.

"There's a certain point, about halfway down the third-floor hallway, where it feels like you're walking into a vacuum. The energy gets so thick so quickly. It's like diving into a pool of water. You learn to brace yourself to initially hit the water, but then keep moving through it. That's how I treat the third floor," she said. "I was walking down that hallway toward that bathroom, and I was moving quickly when I rounded the corner and literally ran into somebody. He was taller, so my face ran right into his chest and all I saw was a yellow shirt. He gasped at the same time I gasped, because we startled each other, but when I stepped back to look at him, he disappeared. There was no one there."

Stunned, Ronzio couldn't believe she encountered a spirit like the ones who shared her "very haunted" childhood home in nearby Dawson.

"I started in the metaphysical field as a teenager in the 1970s and 80s and, at the time, it wasn't something we talked about openly, but all our friends knew what was going on, because they were terrified to spend the night with us," she said. "I learned how to read energies from a young age because I knew what rooms were safe to go into and which weren't. I'd wake up in the middle of the night, and my entire bed would be moved to the other side of my room, so these were not little hauntings. I got a

lot of practice before I left home, which led to communication with energies and spirits, which began my career with the paranormal.”

Encounters with the paranormal that involve objects – like Ronzio’s bed - moving seemingly of their own volition are often classified by ghost-hunting experts as “poltergeist activity.” That same kind of activity, she said, occurs frequently at the community center, along with disembodied voices and other strange phenomena.

“There are times I’ll go into my space there and things will be moved from the desk to the counter, or vice versa, when I know I didn’t leave them there the night before,” she said. “And if I’m in a room, I’ll often hear children in the hallway – walking, laughing, talking; it almost sounds like the whole building is full of people, like there’s an event going on; but when I open the door, it’s silent. There’s no one there.”

While Ronzio considers the entire community center – four floors, including a basement – to be haunted, the third floor is the most active during her classes. There is a theatre capable of full stage productions located off the middle of the floor’s notorious haunted hallway.

“I love the theatre, because I always have experiences there, like extreme temperature fluctuations that happen very quickly and light orbs that you can see flying across the stage in the dark. It’s always on the left side of the stage, but you can hear someone moving furniture or props and people milling about – like residual energies of a stage crew getting ready to send someone on stage,” Ronzio said. “I’ve felt spirits touching me or playing with my hair in the theatre, and there’s a seat on the lefthand side, about three rows down from the back and three seats in – I felt a lot of energy pull me there, so I sat down in it. A few moments after I did, the seat in front of me went down, as if someone sat in it. I’m the first to debunk anything, but we all heard it and saw it.”

Orbs are translucent balls of light energy often associated with spirits. Along with orbs, entities have also made their presence known to Ronzio and her students through “ghost box” sessions. A “ghost box” is a radio that rapidly sweeps through frequencies to create a static sound. It is believed to generate energy and allow ghosts to directly communicate with investigators through various methods, including sensory-deprivation and question-and-answer sessions.

“The last time I took a class to the community center, I had them take turns using the ghost box in places where we were getting high EMF (electromagnetic field) readings. We kept getting a couple of messages coming through over and over, like ‘Don’t touch me,’ and somebody saying ‘Stop it. Stop it,’” Ronzio said. “One message that I believe comes through in every session I’ve ever had is ‘There’s a bad man;’ and it comes through in multiple voices – male and female – multiple times throughout the communications. Once we left the third floor and reached the first-floor office, a voice came through telling us ‘Stay here. It’s not safe,’ because it didn’t want us to go back to where the ‘bad man’ was.”

As for the “bad man’s” identity, Ronzio is unsure of his name or backstory, but believes he follows her groups around the building throughout investigations. She dubbed him “The Watcher,” because his presence is “almost sinister; lecherous.”

“I’m not sure if it’s the same man in the yellow shirt that I ran into,” Ronzio said. “Maybe that’s why he was so surprised when I ran into him. I think he’s used to watching others from the shadows and not being noticed.”

While researching the Connellsville Area Community Center, Ronzio said she didn't find any shocking or standout moments in its history – no murders or other mysterious deaths that often lead to hauntings.

Built in 1916, the facility was the original Connellsville High School, alma mater of John Youie “Long John” Woodruff of South Connellsville, an Olympic gold medalist in middle-distance running. It later served as a junior high until completion of the current Connellsville Area High School in 1972, and then sat vacant for a decade before reopening as the community center.

So, why is the building so haunted? Ronzio has a few theories.

“Places like jails and asylums are paranormal hotspots because of the negative energies that come with the bad things that happen there, but for places like hospitals and cemeteries, it's a little different,” she said. “It's not necessarily the bodies buried there that keep a cemetery haunted – it's the high emotions we, as living people, leave there. The spirits feed off that energy.”

In addition to both World Wars, the original Connellsville Hospital was operational throughout the United States' wars in Korea and Vietnam, and during the first half of the Cold War with the former Soviet Union. Newspapers and other records from that era documented the school's regular use as a community hub for fundraising and other wartime relief efforts.

“That was an era when everyone knew everyone and trusted everybody. Then, all of a sudden, classmates, brothers, fathers, boyfriends were being sent away and killed in war, and these teenagers would've gone through a whole range of emotions rather quickly – happiness to fear, pain and worry,” Ronzio said. “Not to mention, when you're a teenager, hormones make your emotions go up and down frequently anyway. Everything is transitional and life-changing when you're in school, and just the intensity of being a teenager can really create a kind of tattoo in that energy field. It marks the space and never really goes away. An old school like this one really holds energy because, sometimes, it's the last safe or happy place someone had before something bad happened to them.”

Ronzio's theory is further backed by the spirits' seemingly round-the-clock activity. She ran into the ghost man in the yellow shirt in the middle of a sunny afternoon.

“It doesn't matter the time of day, you can go in there and get activity,” she said. “I personally find the energy is most active during the weekdays, at the times when kids would've been in school.”

Ronzio also believes the building's limestone foundation is part of the community center's penchant for hauntings.

“Limestone is a huge natural conductor of energy, and a lot of limestone went into this building's construction,” she said. “There's also a lot of limestone naturally found in this area, so that has a lot to do with it, too. So many old buildings were built on it and using it.”

For the first 30 years of her career, Ronzio worked using only her first name, “because of the stigma attached” to paranormal and metaphysical teachings. In the last ten years, however, she's been embraced by the Connellsville area – and Fayette County, at large - and begun openly sharing her experiences to educate others.

“I will never be satisfied because I’ll never be able to understand it all. I’ll never get all the answers I want, but I love it. I love what I do,” she said. “I’m on a constant quest for communication with the paranormal.”

The Connellsville Area Community Center is located at 201 Fairview Avenue in Connellsville. The Dr. Lillian Ronzio School of Holistic Health is located at 275 Pleasant Valley Road in Connellsville.

To learn more about Ronzio’s paranormal investigations, or to register for upcoming courses, visit www.RonzioSchool.com.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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