

# Haunted Halloween Tradition Resumes at CommSta

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

The U.S. Coast Guard has a long tradition of Halloween happenings in Kodiak. For more than 30 years service members have put on elaborate haunted houses in various locations on base, and invited the community to fright and delight themselves in the festivities.

Phillip Jordinelli is the operations officer at the Coast Guard Communication Station, also known as Commsta, and said the tradition has spread to haunted ships, including the SPAR and more recently the Munro. However, he said it all began at the Commsta in the 1980s. Originally the station hosted fall hay rides at the property along Anton Larsen Bay Road, but it quickly evolved to haunted bunkers in the area and eventually an actual haunted house in the station's main building.

"T-1 Building, which is the main building of the commsta in the basement. And that started sometime in the early 2000 period. So we've done it consistently that I've known of here at the main building for at least five or six years."

Jordinelli said 2011 was the last year the Commsta hosted a haunted house. Tragedy prevented the event from returning the following year.

On April 12, 2012 the bodies of Petty Officer 1st Class James Hopkins and retired Chief Petty Officer Richard Belisle were found by coworkers, shot to death, in a different building at the Commsta.

"Because of that at the time we didn't think it was appropriate to have the haunted house, especially out of respect for the families and ongoing investigation that was still happening, it was still technically a criminal scene here. In 2013 when they made the arrest and the case was coming to closure the crew had asked if we were going to continue this tradition. We talked about it with both spouses of the persons who passed away and they said that they wouldn't have a problem with it if we continued the tradition later. The year memorial happened in April and then at that point the morale committee, which is crewmembers of the Coast Guard here at the Commsta, had decided to continue the fundraising and at that point the commanding officer decided to go ahead with it."

In February James Michael "Jim" Wells was arrested and charged with the murders of Hopkins and Belisle. Wells' trial is currently set for February 2014.

Jordinelli said, for the most part, he has heard positive feedback about the decision to continue the tradition and honor the Coast Guard's fallen shipmates. He said there have been some negative comments about it on Facebook, but ultimately he is confident with the decision and expects this to be the best year yet.

“The Commsta itself is a very large building and the basement in the years past we’ve only done half the basement. But because of the proceeds that we’ve made through the morale process, we’ve doubled the size of it, including an insane asylum, a haunted clown house, a graveyard, all kinds of different new props, in addition too the electric chair and all kinds of fun things that we’ve added in there. So it’s longer, it’s scarier and it’s actually a good time for every body. Initially people get scared, but once they get scared most of the customers that are done with it want to come back for a second round.”

He said the actors include men and women from the Coast Guard, but also civilians that have volunteered their time. As far as the scare factor, and whether or not it’s appropriate for children, Jordinelli said it’s definitely scary, but he would probably give it a PG-13 rating. However, he said whether or not a child should go through it is ultimately the parent’s decision.

The haunted Commsta opens at 5 p.m. on Saturday and will close around 11 p.m. Tickets are \$5 for adults and \$3 for children 12 years and under.