

DAVIS GRAVEYARD

FOR THE LOVE OF HALLOWEEN.

BY LEONARD PICKEL

Known for incredible realistic tombstones, spectacular theatrical lighting and the highest level of detail, what makes the Davis Graveyard truly great is the passion that Chris and Jeff Davis have for haunting.

Longtime horror buffs and Halloween enthusiasts, Jeff and Chris moved into a Tudor style home in 1988 with a yard that just screamed to be haunted. Brick and wrought iron fencing and large trees provided the perfect setting for creating the ultimate Halloween cemetery. It was several years after buying the house that the Davis' first decorated the home for Halloween; it was Chris who got the skull rolling in 1995, by putting out just a few tombstones. She was actually the one who pushed for turning their new house into a more elaborate Home Haunt. Jeff was reluctant at first when Chris was putting out "store bought" decorations, but when she started hand making tombstones, Jeff was won over.

In 1998, an internet search revealed a "how-to" for the "Flying Crank Ghost" (FCG). This new animated prop brought motion to what had been a static display. While there were only about 100 visitors that Halloween night, the response to the FCG was huge and

the seeds were sewn for what has become one of the most creative and technically innovative Home Haunts in the country.

Jeff and Chris then scoured the internet to find other props to build. On the Terror Syndicate website they discovered the Home Haunter's Prop Building Handbooks. "We bought the full set of Prop Building

Handbooks and gave them to each other for Christmas," recalls Chris.

The next big leap was made when the Davis' attended HAuNTcon in 2006. "We learned about foam carving, LED lighting, animatronics, prop controllers, painting techniques and much more," explains Chris. "The conventions really open your eyes to what is out there and what can be done in your yard; and the opportunity to share ideas and meet other haunters is invaluable."

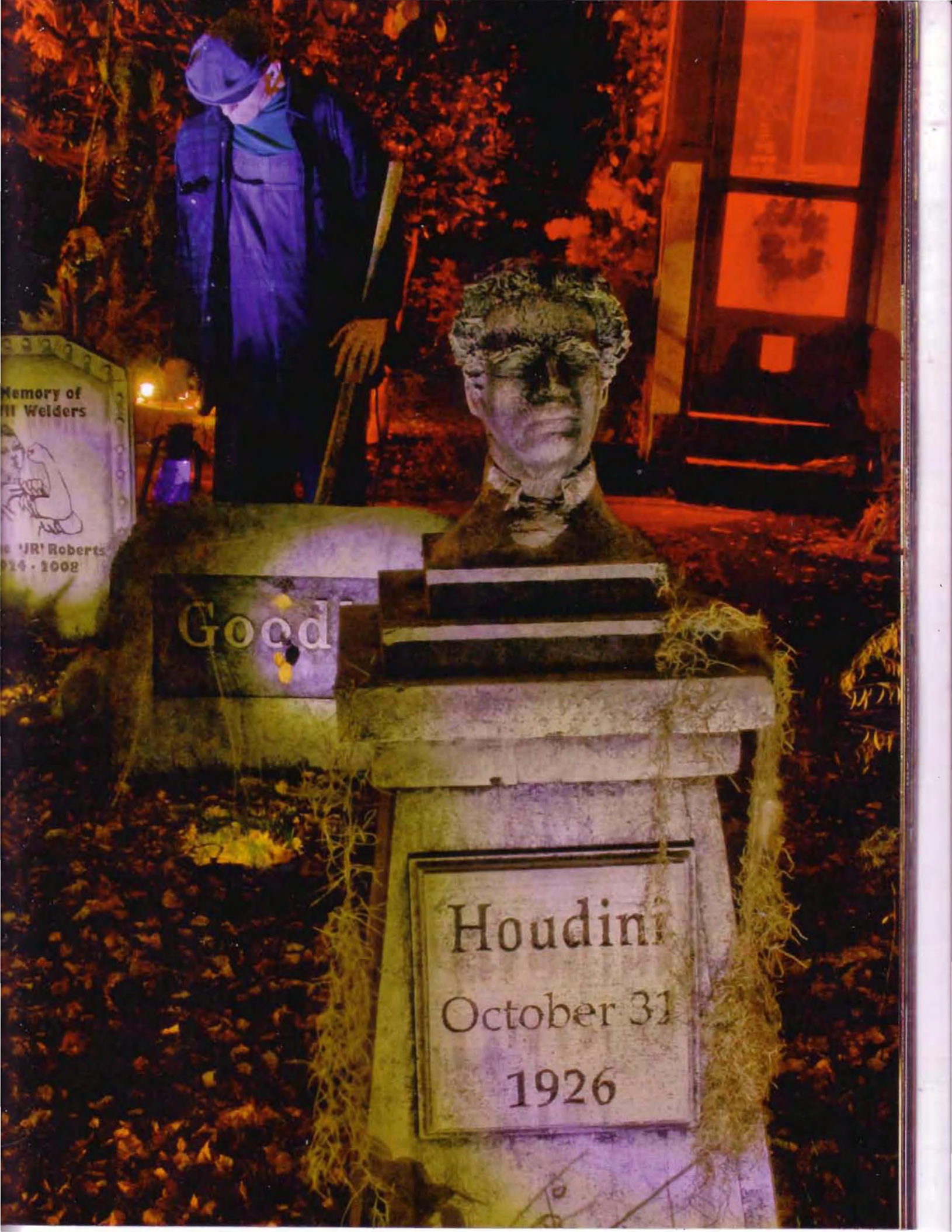
Armed with new found foam carving skills, the Davis' built what are now the centerpieces to their cemetery, a full-sized realistic mausoleum and a three-story church facade for October 2006. Over the door of the mausoleum they carved the name Davis, and the Davis Graveyard was born.

Techniques and technical ingenuity are important to the graveyard, but Jeff and Chris rely heavily on scene and setting to create an eerie mood – going for subtlety over startle. "We believe one of the most important things for any haunted display is theme," explains Jeff. "Anything in the display that doesn't fit the theme is removed and anything that doesn't look realistic enough is improved." Developing a consistent theme and maintaining continuity



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Jeff Davis



Memory of
Bill Welders
All
"JR" Roberts
1914 - 1992

Good

Houdini
October 31
1926

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throughout the display is paramount. "We keep refining our theme and working on more detail and realism," explains Chris.

The Davis Graveyard has gotten its share of press since it was featured on FearNet.com's Haunts Across America series. Jeff and Chris appreciate the attention the Graveyard receives, and they really hope it will inspire other haunters by showing what is possible on a limited budget and with no formal training.

At its present level, the number of props and level of detail in the Davis Graveyard may look overwhelming for Home Haunters just starting out. However, by adding a few more props and a little more detail each year, there is no reason why anyone with the desire and a love of Halloween cannot achieve the same heights as the Davis Graveyard. "If you can paint a room in your house and can do some of your own home repairs, then you can build Halloween props," explains Jeff.

A display style attraction, visitors to the Davis Graveyard are kept off property and view the props and



effects over the fence. The 2008 Davis Graveyard featured 62 engraved tombstones, a three story church facade with an apparition in the window, a large crypt with a ghost and a talking bust that explains the creepy history of the graveyard and its occupants. There was also a turn of the century horse drawn hearse with an animated talking hearse driver that warns visitors of the ghosts and ghouls that haunt the graveyard. People spend 30-45 minutes watching the effects and reading the tombstones. Now in its eleventh season, the Davis

Graveyard draws and estimated 4,000 visitors.

The most talked about effect in the graveyard is the multi media ghost of the Priest. It starts with a projected image of a man coming out of the front door and taking a few steps before fading away. You then hear footsteps as you imagine the ghost walking down the path. Foot prints are seen as the ghost walks down the front steps toward the fence. Then a chained gate rattles startling viewers.

"The Davis Graveyard has become a spectacle of specters that we are all quite proud of," boasts Jeff. "But none of this would have happened had it not been for our good friends and family members who started us down this path, as well as the inspiration from fellow yard haunters throughout the country."

The Davis Graveyard is available for viewing daily in October with lights coming on at dusk until 10pm Monday-Thursday. The effects (sound, video, fog and animations) come on Friday-Sunday from dusk until 11pm. Check out their web site at www.davisgraveyard.com.



WHILE THIS MAY SEEM TO BE THE FACADE OF A LARGE, PROFESSIONAL HAUNTED HOUSE, IT IS ACTUALLY THE FRONT OF JEFF AND CHRIS DAVIS' GARAGE, TRANSFORMED INTO A CHURCH FRONT FOR DAVIS GRAVEYARD.