

Philosophy class asks: 'What can we know?'

Debunking ghost myths in and around Elon reveals theories, knowledge

Rebecca Wickel
Design Editor

Deep in the woods near Bennett is a 40-foot circle where nothing will grow. According to locals, this spot is the Devil's Tramping Ground, where Satan silently paces, plotting and planning.

Senior Brooke Kassner spent a night at this haunted spot to test the validity of myths associated with the Devil's Tramping Ground, along with other students, in 'What Can We Know,' a philosophy course led by Anthony Weston.

"The spookiness of this spot is perpetuated by itself," Weston said. "Kids have made it scary by looking for it to be scary. We wanted to test how true it really was."

The group kept an open mind, which Weston said was a crucial part of the research process. They made two camping expeditions to the site, collecting data and observations to decide whether the claims of haunting and spiritual activity were true.

With Weston's guidance, the students established a scientific methodology to test five myths associated with the site.

"We camped out for a whole night, which was a lot of fun, but we also did some real investigations," Kassner said. "We disproved a few of the premises by making observations and trusting our senses."

According to Kassner, the group was able to prove that a distinguishable circle exists in the forest, but other claims remain false.

"One myth is that all objects within the circle are moved out overnight," she said. "We chained cinderblocks together inside the circle to see if they would move and marked their

location, but nothing happened."

Students also noted that a substantial amount of grass was growing within the circle. Weston collected samples and successfully grew plants in the campground's supposedly barren soil.

By applying theories of knowledge and truth, the philosophy students were able to analyze the adopted myths of the region. To further understand the impact of such legends, they questioned the source of such stories.

"We asked people at local places and the stories have been passed down from generation to generation," Kassner said. "I think a possible explanation for the devil stories is that this is the Bible Belt."

The course also focused on more local myths by analyzing the claims of Elon legends, including the ghost of West dormitory.

Sophomore Sarah Wells investigated the story of Mary, a victim of the fire of 1923.

"We found that apparently no one died in the fire, but it was hard to find one streamlined truth regarding the ghost," Wells said. "We broadened our project to paranormal activity in West."

The class created two surveys, one biased and one neutral, to study the impact of leading questions on initiating paranormal beliefs.

The difference between asking "Do you feel West is haunted?" and "Do you feel comfortable living in West?" encourages different responses, according to Wells.

"We're still looking over the results now, but we've found that people are more likely to talk about Mary when they were asked leading questions," she said. "We can see that the story is



MOLLY CAREY | Staff Photographer
The philosophy class 'What Can We Know?', taught by Anthony Weston, attempted to debunk the ghost story of Mary, who reputedly died in the 1923 fire, and haunts the halls of West dormitory.

being passed on from upperclassmen somehow."

After completing the projects, Kassner and Wells agree that urban legends are used as a means of establishing community.

"It's a bonding thing," Kassner said. "It gives people something to talk about, and that's important for people coming together."

From Bennett to Elon, urban legends continue to perpetuate superstition, an interesting concept for philosophers.

"We made a serious effort to be fair," Weston said. "We're skeptics, but that's philosophy. The question is: What's the best explanation for the spooky things we experienced? And we may never know for sure."



Decorating with a cause

Holiday display raises money, awareness

Ashley Fahey
Features Editor

Some of the most prominent symbols of holiday celebrations are Christmas lights strung through bushes, trees and around doorways. Most people stick to conventional decorating to enhance the beauty of their home.

But Jimmy Curiazza, plumbing supervisor at Elon's Physical Plant, has created a Christmas lights show at his Gibsonville home, complete with music synchronization. The display is meant to be a fundraiser in memory of his brother, Dean, who passed away as a child from leukemia.

Curiazza will be raising money for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS), which is a nonprofit health organization that conducts researches and provides resources to those afflicted with blood cancers.

"My wife and I always talked about what we can do in my brother's honor," he said. "That's where the idea to contact the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society came in. The society was excited about the idea and from there, it kept snowballing downhill."

Curiazza started coordinating holiday lights with music last year, but he said this is the first time his show has acted as a fundraiser.

"What started out as me goofing around with Halloween decorations this past Halloween led to this," he said. "While the Halloween decorations were up, my wife Tracy kept joking with people, saying 'If only he'd use his powers for good.' After the displays were recorded and hit YouTube, they got a little popular. What started out as joking with Linda Lashendock (manager of video services and event production) led to the idea of a Christmas display."

Setting up the Christmas lights

requires a lot of time and energy.

"It's insanity," Curiazza said. "Setting up includes computer programming, steel fabrication of the displays, attaching lights to the displays, music synchronization, assembly of digital output controllers, mounting displays to the house, testing circuitry — did I say insanity?"

He said in the display, there are three Christmas-themed heads — Rudolph, Santa and a snowman — in addition to about 20 other yard displays that will flash with the music. The heads will sing the songs.

"It takes about eight hours to synchronize a song," he said. "It takes about 20 hours to fabricate, paint, mount lights and hang each head. Getting the bugs out can be anywhere from minutes to days, just depending."

Curiazza's Halloween display had been more popular than he had anticipated.

"I heard people from blocks away yelling to their friends, 'Come see this,'" he said. "It was fun. Nobody knew what I was up to until it was too late. It turned out better than I had planned. Hopefully, Christmas will surpass that."

Curiazza has a fundraiser goal of \$5,000 and a page on the LLS website that tells his brother's story and encourages people to donate.

"To date, and it really hasn't been pushed yet, the fund has raised over \$1,000," he said.

Christmas has been traditionally viewed as a season of giving, and Curiazza's fundraiser is something he hopes will make a difference. He said he has always wanted to do something in honor of his brother, and this seemed perfect.

"My brother, Dean, passed away Dec. 5, 1967," Curiazza said. "Christmases haven't been the same since. Perhaps that's why I enjoy doing this for the little ones."



EXAM WEEK SPECIAL

Show your student ID anytime
between now and December 15th
and get 50% off of your custom
frozen treat

Come study with us: We have free wifi!

Open Monday
through Saturday
11 a.m. - 10 p.m.
Sunday noon - 9
p.m.

12 Flavors of
yogurt daily with
more than 50
toppings!

