

Hunters or debunkers?

Though Jason Hawes (left) and Grant Wilson both claim to have had experiences with the paranormal, they're not exactly on a wild goose chase. "We actually had a different view about the paranormal and how it should be approached," Wilson explains of their method. "We went in and tried to disprove the claims that the people had."

With a team that includes HVAC professionals and other technical and construction professionals, they set out to explain things that go bump – or flush – in the night.

"Eighty per cent of what we come across, we can debunk, and a lot of times that's due to our plumbing knowledge," Wilson says. "Don't forget the flapper valve that makes everybody think their uncle Fred who used to be a plumber is telling them that he's there by flushing the toilet at 3 a.m.," Hawes offers as an example. "Really, they're going to bed at 11 and the flapper valve is leaking, so it's likely that it takes that long before the toilet kicks back on."

Cases they can't explain become more credible, Wilson says, because they withstand the expert scrutiny.

"Our goal is to help people and find out the truth," he says. "If you find something odd, it stands the test because you've already tried to disprove it."

Cover Story

Plumbers by day GHOST HUNTERS BY NIGHT

By Dave Bowden

Jason Hawes and Grant Wilson are like thousands of other tradesmen. The two New England plumbers got into the field at the encouragement of family and friends, and ended up falling in love with the rewarding nature of the work.

"My favourite thing about working in plumbing is that every day is something different," Hawes says.

"The harder you work, the smarter you work, the more you make. You're really out there making a difference," adds Wilson.

Of course, Jason Hawes and Grant Wilson are also very different from most tradesmen.

After about a decade in plumbing, the two now spend most of their time traipsing the continent in search of the otherworldly. As the stars of *Ghost Hunters*, Hawes and Wilson ply their trade by trying to disprove reported paranormal activity. (See sidebar above: Hunters or debunkers?)



Ghost hunting gear

Tools in the TAPS arsenal include:

- Tape recorder and digital video camera
- Infrared camera with DV recorder
 - Digital thermometer
 - EMF detector
 - Ion generator
- White noise generator

Getting Ghostly

Airing in 171 countries around the world, including on OLN here in Canada, *Ghost Hunters* has become somewhat of a phenomenon itself since it launched in 2004. It recently aired its 100th episode, and has already spawned two spin-offs, *Ghost Hunters International* and *Ghost Hunters Academy*.

So, how did two plumbers from New England become the world's most famous ghost hunters? By having their own close encounters. And a modem.

"We both had our own personal experiences (with the paranormal) that we just always kept private," Hawes explains. Though the two friends have never divulged the nature of their "experiences" to the public, it was enough to prompt them to found Rhode Island Paranormal, which became The Atlantic Paranormal Society (TAPS) in 1990.

From there, TAPS established a website and found a home within a budding community of internet users and paranormal enthusiasts. "TAPS really excelled on the internet," Hawes says. "Before the show, we got 30,000 hits per day. Since the show, last year alone we did 96 million hits."

FROM TAPS TO TV STARS

The success of TAPS caught the eye of TV producers, who started pitching Hawes and Wilson on the idea of turning their company into a television series. After turning down initial offers, the pair negotiated a deal that would allow them to launch the show on their own terms. "We told them, if you want to spend millions of dollars making a TV show and you want us to catch ghosts, then we'll leave right now," Wilson recalls. "But if you want to spend millions of dollars and you don't care if we catch a ghost or not, then let's do it."

Of course, television can be a fickle business. There was no guarantee the show would be successful, and the guys weren't about to quit their day jobs.

"When the show started, for the longest time we were working our normal work week for Roto Rooter and we were also doing the show," Hawes explains. "We were literally working somewhere in the vicinity of 100 to 120 hours per week."

Once the show took off, the pair was able to transition into ghost hunting full time. But with six seasons and more than 100 episodes under their belts, they still find the time to ply their trade in a more traditional manner.

"When production (on the show) slows down, it goes back to the norm where we can go help out on jobs and check on things and price out things for people," Hawes says.

Despite their success, neither Hawes nor Wilson has let the whirlwind of the past few years go to their heads. At the end of the day, they're still tradesmen who take pride in their work.

OPERATING IN OTHER WORLDS

As if hunting ghosts, hosting TV and radio shows and squeezing in the occasional plumbing job weren't enough, Hawes and Wilson have ventured into the literary world as well. They've written two books, "Ghost Hunting" and "Seeking Spirits," which both placed on the New York Times' best-sellers list. Their next venture? A series of young-adult novels to be released this fall, titled "Ghost

Hunt," which they're working on with the wife of famed children's author R.L. Stine.



GHOST HUNTERS