

Who would've known?

Byline info is not available

4-5 minutes

Interest in Ouija boards spells success for Hanover man



••

Dan Whitaker has been collecting Ouija boards since he was a teenager. When he started collecting, none of his Ouija boards predicted he would become a prop designer for a movie.

By his account, Whitaker owns between three and four dozen of the boards used to conduct seances, or talk to spirits.

The Hanover native owns some boards from as far back as the

1890s, when the popular boards started being mass produced, but his favorite boards come from the 1920s.

A few years ago, Whitaker started making his own Ouija boards and selling them online through a website he operates. He has another full-time job, even though his website takes a lot of his time. He said making Ouija boards is "more of a hobby than a business."

Ouija board quality, Whitaker said, has declined steadily over the years. So, instead of using what he considers subpar Ouija boards, he decided to make a higher quality board and planchette - the heart-shaped piece that moves across the board, spelling out a message.

"They started out as wood and then they went through some changes and settled on molded plastic," Whitaker said about the more modern planchette. "All of mine are made of wood."

Whitaker makes his boards out of plywood and hard wood, like the original boards he admires. From there, he hand stencils the boards and lacquers them. All of the work is done in his home.

His handcrafted "Raimi Boards," have been sold to spirit-seekers in all 50 states and dozens of countries. His website, www.witchboardworld.com, is one of the first sites on the web featuring hand-crafted Ouija boards.

He created the website and has maintained it since 1999.

Because of his online reputation, Whitaker's boards have been sought after by television and movie production companies.

"ABC and CBS have purchased a total of six of my boards for their prop departments," Whitaker said.

One of his boards is also featured in the independent horror film, "Jonah Lives." The Internet Movie Data Base describes the film as

"a story of revenge from beyond the grave, centering on a group of teenagers who unknowingly supply the catalyst for the murdered Jonah's return from the grave."

Whitaker is listed as a prop maker in the film's credits.

"It's a really small independent movie," he said. "As long as you like bad horror, you'll like it. But, I like bad horror."

Whitaker creates several types of boards. He has a basic model board, but also more elaborate boards with influences from some of his favorite Ouija boards and other Ouija boards from around the world.

"It generally takes me about two to three hours for one of my bigger ones," he said.

All those hours spent stenciling Ouija boards is starting to pay off. Another television show plans to display one of his boards. Internet show USA Up All Night is featuring his board, and Halloween, he said, is always a busy time.

"Halloween is like Christmas for the Ouija board business," he said.