



Selected articles from  
VOL. 17 NO. 4 SPRING 2005

## Court TV's *Psychic Detectives* to feature John Monti

By [Gary P. Posner](#)

Though we don't yet know the extent to which his exploits will be exploited for ratings, an upcoming episode of [Psychic Detectives](#), Court TV's inexcusable excuse for a documentary series, is slated to feature Long Island's [John Monti](#).

Monti made a splash -- which instant replay determined to be a belly flop -- in the local media back in November 1991 when he held a press conference in Clearwater to announce his intention to solve the case of Tiffany Sessions, the University of Florida student who had mysteriously disappeared from its Gainesville campus several years earlier.

As reported in our [Winter 1991-92](#) and [Spring 1992](#) issues, working with Tiffany's mother Hillary (the father and the police wanted no part of him), Monti toured the area where Tiffany was last seen, but was unable to come up with any useful information. Tiffany remains missing to this day.

Two of Kathy Fountain's *Eye on Tampa Bay* programs (now called *Your Turn*) on Ch. 13 had been devoted to Monti's efforts. The second (January 27, 1992) featured Hillary's recounting of Monti's failure: "We walked around, and we took a route that he said that he thought that she went . . . but we came to nothing." During that show, a viewer/caller identifying himself as Jim Basile, the ex-police chief of Buckland, Massachusetts, stated that he had once worked with Monti on a murder case, and that although Monti had indicated that the murderer was still alive, he was later found to have been long dead, "hanging from a tree. . . [Monti offers] a lot of hopes, but his results leave a little bit to be desired."

To the ears of the producers of Court TV's *Psychic Detectives*, Basile's words may sound like a ringing endorsement. On January 16th of this year, I received an e-mail from Gail Ober, a reporter for

the small Greenfield, Massachusetts daily newspaper, *The Reporter*, who told me that she had learned two days earlier that an episode of *Psychic Detectives* was to be filmed January 17-21 in the nearby town of Buckland, where that caller's case had taken place. The following is excerpted from Ober's e-mail:

In 1988, a young woman named Sharon Gregory was brutally murdered in her Greenfield home. Although never proved in a court of law, a classmate of the victim named Mark Branch was widely believed to have killed her. There is little doubt that he did, in fact, kill this young woman. Within hours of the discovery of Sharon Gregory's body, Branch's bloodstained car was found along a rural road in a neighboring town, sparking a manhunt that paralyzed and terrified this small town.

Three weeks after Branch disappeared in the woods, the police were hopelessly baffled and the case was brought to the attention of John Monti. The police worked with Monti for about three or four days. According to then Buckland Police Chief Jim Basile, Monti was flown to western Massachusetts and his expenses were paid by members of the local police force, largely from their own pockets. I have heard that the family of the victim also chipped in but I have not been able to confirm this. According to Basile, Monti never gave them any useful information and was not paid his salary. Ultimately, Branch's body was found by a hunter. The coroner said he had been dead since the day of the murder. He hanged himself.

Beginning Monday, Jan. 17, Monti will be in town to assist Storyhouse Productions with the filming of the reenactment. Nicole Tuesch of Storyhouse was less than forthcoming when I contacted her Friday afternoon. She strongly discouraged my covering the story, which naturally piqued my interest.

I have not been able to get a production schedule. The victim's mother and father will not be participating in the reenactment but her twin sister, Cheryl, said she will -- if only to tell her family's side of the story. The Gregorlys were not contacted by Storyhouse Productions, although the film crew has made contact with local police, who subsequently contacted the Gregorlys.

In my reply to Ober, I told her that

I think the big story is the fact that Court TV, through its "Psychic Detectives" series, is uncritically hyping such shameless self-promoters, with total disregard for the truth of the cases. By broadcasting fictionalized reenactments of this sort, and claiming them to be factually accurate, Court TV is engaging in behavior that is contemptuous of the viewing public, and perhaps even in violation of its FCC license. As I point out on my website, the "Psychic Detectives" portion of the Court TV website includes information from James Randi and myself ([here](#) and [here](#)), so they are well aware of the deliberately deceptive nature of their TV series.

I would encourage you to do a first-rate investigative piece that hopefully can be carried not only in your small daily, but picked up by the Associated Press or some other national publication. In my opinion, the story of Court TV's reckless behavior deserves coverage in "Time" or "Newsweek," if not in federal court.

Unfortunately, Ober's reply the following day indicated that her editor "does not see the story the way I see it. His concern is primarily the effect on the town, which as far as I can tell is negligible. . . . If I can get an interview with Monti or any of the police involved in the case, I will pursue this on my own." She also confirmed that ex-police chief Jim Basile, whom she had interviewed two days before first contacting me, now lives in Florida, which explains how he had happened to see Kathy Fountain's show about Monti.

My last contact with Ober was two days later, when she advised me, "I still have not had any luck

catching up to the film crew. My editor has sent me elsewhere. . . . Take heart, it's 10 below zero in Buckland, so wherever the crew is, it's likely they are very cold." She added that she planned to contact me again "to share with you some ideas I have," but I heard nothing further.

Will Hell have to reach the wintry temperatures of Buckland before we should expect Court TV's *Psychic Detectives* to rate Monti's score in this case as a minus 10? We hope to find out. Stay tuned.

---

## **Noreen Renier credited in Oxford, Ohio case**

Our last issue [reported](#) on ex-Florida "psychic detective" [Noreen Renier](#)'s involvement in the case of a missing retired Miami professor in Oxford, Ohio. The following is excerpted from the *Oxford Press*, December 2:

Closure inched closer to the family of missing Alzheimer's patient Charles Capel when a hunter stumbled over what turned out to be his skull bones and teeth around 4:26 p.m. Wednesday.

Located about .8 of a mile from his former Patrick Drive residence, the remains of the 81-year-old had been left unseen amidst two community-wide searches which drew hundreds of empathetic and eager volunteers. . . . The small patch of cornfield-surrounded woodland where Capel was found possessed uncanny similarities to the area psychic detective Noreen Renier described to police. They enlisted her aid after search and rescue teams, bloodhounds, helicopter patrols and riders on horseback failed to unearth any clues.

Though hundreds of miles away from the scene in Virginia, she was able to envision bits of his journey through contact with his shoes and toothbrush.

[Oxford Police Sgt. Jim] Squance was struck by the similarities. "She said he went out the driveway and turned left and walked down a lane with a fence line," he said. "She said there was a tower with an antenna on top of it."

Renier had also mentioned a large stone, a creek, and a wooded area. From Capel's location, a fence bordered the nearby water tower access road; a small creek meandered in the woods; and a nearby subdivision's stone entrance marker bore the words "Stone Creek." . . .

Statistics indicate that missing Alzheimer's patients are typically found relatively close to home. Prompted by Renier and this fact, an Oct. 24 search with over 300 people dissected a one square mile quadrant of northwest Oxford.

"We thought all along he got confused and wandered in the wrong place," Squance said.

Benjamin Radford's "News and Comment" item about this case in the March/April issue of *Skeptical Inquirer* included this paragraph: "Sgt. Squance's awe is hard to fathom. An objective look at the facts suggests that Renier's information was both unremarkable and unhelpful. The police received her assistance in early October, yet two months elapsed before Capel's remains were found -- not by police directed by Renier to a specific area, but by a local hunter."

## Florida Board of Governors nixes FSU School of Chiropractic

A proposed School of Chiropractic at Florida State University, which would have been the first chiropractic school in the country to be affiliated with a major public university, was voted down 10-3 by the state Board of Governors on January 27.

The school, which was never embraced by the FSU faculty and was to be funded by state revenues to the tune of \$9-million per year in perpetuity, was being pushed by several legislators with personal agendas, including:

- State Senate President Jim King (as a favor to chiropractor/friend State Sen. Dennis Jones)
- Sen. Jones (who had hoped to work at the school)
- Florida House Speaker Johnny Byrd (who in return received an Alzheimer's research center at the University of South Florida)

Leading the opposition among FSU's faculty was Dr. Ray Bellamy, an orthopedic surgeon, who characterized chiropractic as "almost fraudulent. . . . It is deluding the public when you give a doctor's degree to this person." He added, "Other than for low back pain . . . almost everything they do [can be attributed to] bedside manner and placebo effect. . . . From a scientific standpoint, all of the [benefits beyond] placebo could be taught in a one-semester [physical therapy] course."

Bellamy and other doctors at FSU also expressed concern about the risk of stroke from neck manipulations. Two emergency room physicians had contacted Bellamy about the cases that they had seen, which result from the rapid twist tearing the lining of an artery at the back of the neck, most often in young, healthy patients.

The purpose of such manipulations is to relieve "subluxations" -- mild spinal misalignments -- in the neck and back, which purportedly cause interruption in nerve flow to other parts of the body, resulting in such diverse ailments as asthma and diabetes. But the subluxation theory, the central tenet of chiropractic, is a quack notion. "The theory that human health and disease is controlled through the spinal column through nerve blockage is pseudoscience," says George Bates, a molecular geneticist at FSU. "There is no evidence for subluxation."

A healthy minority of chiropractors agree with Dr. Bates. One, Samuel Homola, now retired and living in Panama City, has written a book critical of the subluxation theory. "We have some good chiropractors, but the majority of the schools, and the state laws, define chiropractic as a method that shouldn't be taught at FSU."

In the end, after Governor Jeb Bush urged them to "vote their consciences," the state Board of Governors killed the proposal, and, says FSU president T.K. Wetherell, "I'm not going to bring it back."

--Gary P. Posner, M.D.

[The information in this article  
was obtained from the

*St. Petersburg Times* (Jan. 19 and 28)

and the *Tampa Tribune* (Jan. 14).]

## Snippets



53-year-old Cuban émigré Jose Miranda was not content as a master of numerology, tarot, and astrology. Miranda is now resident "rumpologist" for the "phenomenally popular and raunchy late-night talk show *La Cosa Nostra* on [Miami's] Spanish-language WJAN-TV, Channel 41. . . . The program's highly rated rump-shaking segments of scantily clad models . . . have taken a back seat to Miranda's revealing fortune telling. . . . The butt oracle traces every line, curvature, dimple and imperfection of a person's posterior." Miranda explains, seriously, that "the left cheek [portends] the future [and] the right cheek is the cheek of the present." Sounds ass-backwards to me.

(*South Florida Sun-Sentinel* via *Tampa Tribune*, Dec. 28)

For years, some guests at Clearwater's Belleview Biltmore Resort & Spa, which is in jeopardy of demolition by developers, have been reporting ghostly apparitions wandering the halls, banging on doors and turning on lights, and even invisible elevator operators. And now it seems we have photographic proof! While attending a party there on December 4, Clearwater couple Joseph and Yvonne Houston had their picture taken in front of a stairway, and upon receiving the developed photo noticed a misty, white image beside them. Though the establishment's manager says the blur resembles "some kind of light or cigarette smoke," Yvonne has another plausible scientific explanation: "I think this spirit knows if the hotel gets torn down, it will lose its home . . . so it wanted

to show everyone it lives there."

*(St. Petersburg Times, Dec. 22)*

---

Perhaps the Houstons should contact a group called Central Florida Ghost Research. Based in Palm Coast (between Daytona Beach and Jacksonville), members are equipped with the latest in ghost-detection gear for measuring electromagnetic fields and temperature. Founder Tom Iacuzio acknowledges that "there's a lot more to be proven before it's said to be a true science," but he and his troops believe they are pioneers in the grand tradition of Galileo and other visionary scientists. Pat Linse, co-founder (with Michael Shermer) of the [Skeptics Society](#), has another word to describe such pursuits: "crapola. . . . Scientific jargon doesn't mean that what they're doing is scientific." Fellow Skeptics Society member Tom McDonough, an astrophysicist, noted that electromagnetic fluctuations can be caused by myriad factors such as power lines and underground pipes.

*(Daytona Beach News-Journal via Tampa Tribune, Dec. 6)*

---

The Kanaya, a new 15-story, 35-unit luxury condo in Sarasota, is being constructed with many health amenities, including some derived from the Chinese art of feng shui. Developer Harvey Kaltas, who is also a practitioner of Oriental medicine, brought in Sarasota feng shui master Katrine Karley to work with the architect and contractor to insure that, as Karley says, "everything is designed in harmony [and] each condo is properly aligned" to enhance the flow of positive energy, or "chi." Bamboo flutes in some walls will "take away the poison arrows," and wood and metal will be positioned to promote "continuous energetic flow."

*(St. Petersburg Times, Jan. 1)*

---

## Letter to the Editor

Editor: We have been out of touch for many years. Because you prominently feature me and our written exchanges on your website, I thought you might be interested in an update.

I have had countless positive responses about [me and my research and discoveries](#) thanks to your posting, from laymen, professionals and medical doctors. Thank you for continuing to promote me with free and valuable "advertising" that cannot be bought at any price.

I do not expect nor am I requesting a response from you, but keep up the good work of promoting me and Tri-Vortex Technology.

--Brian David Andersen

San Juan Capistrano, CA  
info@trivortex.com

Editor's reply: What followed were many paragraphs containing the sort of claims that permeate Andersen's website. My article about our original exchange, in our Summer 1999 issue, can be found [here](#). In a nutshell, Andersen requested a TBS "[\\$1,000 Challenge](#)" of his paranormal technology's ability to alter the taste of liquids. But when he proposed that actor George Hamilton be the "Project Coordinator," we objected, prompting Andersen to accuse TBS of renegeing on an imagined agreement.

---

Return to [TBS Report Online](#)

---

© 2005 by Tampa Bay Skeptics and Center For Inquiry Tampa Bay