

By Bonnie Prindle

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Most people wouldn't choose to spend their birthday trapped inside a dimly-lit room with their family and friends, desperately searching for clues to an escape. But that's exactly how Charlie Bramer celebrated her thirteenth birthday, and she had a great time doing it.

Charlie and her family decided to celebrate her birthday this year by visiting 108 Escape, a new escape room that just opened in Salem.

The group was led into a room of puzzles inspired by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. They were only allowed one hour on the "estate," and they had to use clues and solve various puzzles in order to escape before time was up.

"How long have we been in here?" Charlie asked when the group got stumped. Lisa Weill, wife of 108 Escape owner Tom Weill, laughed.

"Four minutes," she said.

Despite a slow start, the group soon hit their stride and escaped in just under 55 minutes.

“It took us a minute to get started, but once we started rolling we got it,” said Billy Bramer, Charlie’s father. “I thought it was really cool, and I’m ready for them to do another one.”

The owners of 108 Escape, Tom Weill and Chris McEachran, have plans to put two more rooms into the same building in the near future. For now, however, they’re thrilled to watch participants have a great time in the room they’ve built from the ground up.

Tom and Chris, old friends and new business partners, talked about opening a haunted house in Salem for some time. When they looked into it, they found that the building codes for a haunted house were complicated and expensive, but the codes for an escape room were not.

A mutual friend opened an escape room in Michigan, and Tom and Chris decided that building their own would be the next best thing.

“I think we soon found out that we actually ended up doing a better thing,” said Chris. “With the haunted houses, people are just kind of rushing through and the experience is really lacking, but with an escape room you have a full hour to enjoy yourself and to immerse yourself in stories.”

Chris worked on coming up with the stories and puzzles, while Tom took the lead on fabrication. In the end, however, they were both very involved in every step of the process.

The most challenging part of creation, according to Chris, was keeping up with their imaginations.

“We’d start making something and we’d say, ‘You know what? If we did it this way we could make it better,’” said Chris. “Then we’d have to rebuild something, but at the end, we were both really happy with the final product.”

What they've created is an entertaining evening for the whole family to enjoy, right in the growing town of Salem. Tom and Lisa, who live in town, are excited to bring a night of entertainment to their own backyard.

"There's no reason to leave town and drive all the way to Jeffersonville or Louisville," said Tom. "We're ready to help Salem grow, business-wise."

They hope to have a new pirate-themed room open by the Halloween season, and they're currently working on a room that will center around the history of Washington County.

"We've made something a little different, it has a nice eerie feel to it," said Chris. "Horror fans won't be disappointed at all. But at the same time, we gave something that I think the whole family can enjoy, and that was in both of our hearts to do it that way. It's a great, creepy, haunted time."

108 Escape is currently open on Thursdays from 5:30-8:30 PM, Fridays from 5:30-10:30 PM, and Saturdays from 2:30-10:30 PM. Reservations can be made at 108escape.com.