

Trouble is brewing for witch in south DeKalb

Critics, county question whether property is residence or church

By Gayle White
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It's toil and trouble for a DeKalb County witch this summer as she battles critics and county officials over whether her south DeKalb property is a residence or a church.

Lady Sintana, founder and high priestess of the Ravenwood Church and Seminary of Wicca, was scheduled to appear Wednesday at a DeKalb County zoning hearing to request a variance that would allow property on Rainbow Drive to be used as a place of religious worship.

The county has said she must seek the variance or cease religious activity at the house, which is zoned residential.

But Lady Sintana said Monday she will not attend the hearing because her property is not a public house of worship. All religious activity at the house has been private, she said. "This is my home. If I want to have my friends over and wear black robes and have a barbecue, that's my business," she said.

Public activities of the church of Wicca are held at the Phoenix & Dragon bookstore off Roswell Road, she said.

Some neighbors have questioned the number of visitors and the type of activities at the house.

"I know very little about this type of worship, but I am seriously concerned about what is taking place behind those doors," state Sen. John Parrish wrote in a letter to DeKalb Chief Executive Officer Liane Levetan this summer.

The senator said he became involved after neighbors of Lady Sintana raised the issue at a

meeting of the Rainbow Forest-Knollview Civic Association he attended in June.

A second meeting Aug. 6 drew more than 100 residents.

Lady Sintana said concerns are based on misperceptions of Wicca, a pagan religion that precedes Christianity. Witches see the divinity as both God and Goddess, she said, and the religion is very nature-oriented.

Ravenwood was founded in 1975 in the Little Five Points area as the Sisterhood and Brotherhood of Wicca. It was given tax-exempt status as the Ravenwood Church and Seminary of Wicca in 1980.

Lady Sintana moved to south DeKalb four years ago.

"I have in my home here an anonymity I've really enjoyed," she said. "We thought we had built some good community relations."