

UFOs are still being spotted

By Dennis Byrne

CHICAGO (CST) — Just because you don't see frequent reports in the media any more of unidentified flying objects, don't get the idea they are not being spotted.

"We get several a week, but no one pays any attention," says J. Allen Hynek, director of the Center for UFO Studies in north suburban Evanston. "It's not considered newsworthy any more, unless it involves some prominent person. People say, 'So, what else is new?'"

Despite the skepticism and lack of interest, reports keep flowing into the center. Recent reports generally are of higher quality, and two-thirds involve witnesses, said Hynek, professor emeritus of astronomy at Northwestern University. "Fewer and fewer people are being fooled by the Goodyear blimp," he said last week.

"Just this morning, we had a report of two deer hunters in the wilds of upper Michigan. There was a completely overcast sky and this light came along. They flashed their flashlight at it and it (the light) answered back. It made maneuvers that were obviously guided by intelligence. They were so utterly scared, they abandoned the camp."

"Good" UFO reports tend to be from isolated rural areas. "For some reason, many, many of our reports come from people driving late at night and usually with witnesses."

And no, he hasn't found any increase in sightings on Halloween. Nor on April Fool's Day, holidays or even on weekends, when people are partying and might be expected to be somewhat more imaginative in what they see. In fact, he said, most sightings occur on weekdays.

Most sightings are "close encounters of the first kind," those that occur within a few hundred feet of the observer. Generally, the objects are tremendous concentrations of luminous energy, having a form that cannot be clearly defined and that maneuver as though they are "programmed."

He said he doesn't believe UFOs are visitors from some distant solar system because the huge distances involved make such a trip unlikely. "The only honest thing I can say is that we just don't have any idea, any more than the best physicist in the early 1900s could have told us why the sun shines. The sun is a nuclear energy device," he pointed out.

"You would think the scientific world would be agog" at inexplicable phenom-

ena, he said. He is particularly nettled by the refusal in some quarters to treat his efforts as serious scientific inquiry.

An example is the unfair treatment he said he received at the hands of Nova, a public television science series. In preparation for a program that appeared last month on UFOs, "they came here and taped for two days. I presented cases to them I couldn't explain. But they didn't mention those on the program," he said. Instead, they concentrated on cases that could be easily dismissed.

"It was a most biased presentation. . . . It gave the impression that anyone who has spent time investigating (UFOs) wasn't playing with a full deck of cards."

It hasn't been easy for Hynek to finance the center, which he runs from his home. He's tried various foundations for grants, he said, "but the subject has been ridiculed so much because of these idiots, these nuts who say they have been to Venus on a flying saucer. It completely discredits any serious scientific efforts."

But he encouraged those who want reliable scientific information on UFOs or who want to file reports on sightings to contact the center at post office box 1402, Evanston, Ill. 60204.