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# UFO parley finds a skeptic at MSU

By Tom Wickham 6-27-86  
News Lansing Bureau

LANSING — When Jack MacConnell peers into the night sky, he doesn't expect a flying saucer to swoop down and whisk him away to exotic planets.

On the contrary, the Michigan State University associate professor of astronomy is angry that so-called UFO (unidentified flying objects) experts insist Earth is visited by extraterrestrials.

His ire is raised even more because these specialists will converge on MSU Saturday for the two-day, 17th annual UFO Symposium.

"THE POSSIBILITY of extraterrestrial life is being taken seriously," MacConnell said. "But astronomers do not take seriously that UFOs are extraterrestrial. Maybe within several hundred light years ... I don't think it's impossible there's a planet with life, but the distances are too enormous. I just can't imagine we're being visited."

As many as 300 members of the Mutual UFO Network Inc., including specialists in the fields of astronautics, physics, natural science and aerospace technology, will discuss the existence of UFOs, alleged abductions by aliens and purported cover-ups by the federal government. This is the first time the international symposium will be conducted at MSU.

"UFO reports are basically treated by science as garbage," said Ron Westrum, an Eastern Michigan Uni-

versity professor of sociology and consultant to the network. "Science has a great deal of difficulty accepting that (UFOs) don't fall within the model scientists expect things to happen." The network, with 1,500 members, is one of the largest UFO proponent groups in the nation.

Debate has raged for years. UFO proponents contend the scientific world is "close-minded." Scientists counter that UFO believers dabble in the occult or science fiction fancy.

**MacCONNELL FORMED PRISM** (Proponents of Rational Inquiry and the Scientific Method), a group with 15 MSU and Lansing Community College faculty and students, last October as his attempt to debunk claims that UFOs and astrology have scientific roots. He contends they are "a throwback to beliefs and superstitions."

Evidence supporting extraterrestrial visitation is based primarily on photographs, sightings and reported abductions. No aliens have made verified contact with Earth.

Both Westrum and MacConnell agree that about 90 percent of all reported UFO sightings can be explained as ordinary items such as balloons and airplanes.

MacConnell claims UFO proponents play upon the remaining 10 percent as extraterrestrial visitations, when in fact they are natural phenomena that cannot be recreated in the laboratory.

"These cases could be explained as normal if we had enough data," he said.

Bill Kingsley  
VIA  
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