

Crowd drawn to Wytheville to describe close encounters

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WYTHEVILLE — More than 100 people came to a community college auditorium here Wednesday night to hear accounts of unidentified flying objects seen over Wythe County in recent months.

It turned out that Wythe is not the only area where they've been seen.

A woman who lives in a wooded area of Patrick County said she and her husband watched objects with green and red flashing lights illuminating their area for two nights "like we were in the city, almost."

Another woman had her encounter driving from Wythe to Smyth County on Interstate 81 as part of her job.

"I am not searching for UFOs. In fact I'm driving down the road saying, 'Not me, not tonight, I don't have time,'" she said.

But she still saw a large light that seemed to be moving just a little faster than her own 65 mph, she said. And, on the way back, there was another, even closer one that almost seemed to be hanging over the right side of the road.

At first she had a feeling of disbelief, she said, "but then I immediately think 'UFO' and put my foot to the gas pedal as fast as I can."

A Covington woman who thought she heard her baby crying about 4:30 a.m. Wednesday spotted what seemed at first to be a very bright star, twinkling red and green. Then, she said, she saw another one to its left.

She tried to focus her telescope on the object and found it was moving very slowly across the sky. Then she saw a third object. All three continued moving about the sky for more than an hour, she said.

"I'm still pretty nervous about this. You guys have had more time to get used to it," she said.

The conference at Wytheville Community College was arranged by Danny Gordon, news and sports director

for a Wytheville radio station that has been deluged with calls about UFO sightings in recent weeks.

Gordon described his own UFO sightings and encouraged others to do the same, to see if patterns could be detected. He said the speakers need not give their names, just describe what they saw and when they saw it.

Also attending were David Bodner, a West Virginia director of Mutual UFO Network, which tries to document sightings; Barbara Finney of Troutville, who has studied and written on the subject; and Victor Jackson, a UFO researcher from San Antonio, Texas.

Participating by telephone from Ohio was Leonard Stringfield, author of "Condition Red" and other books on UFOs. "I think what you're all seeing down there is of extraterrestrial origin, and they're not conventional aircraft," he said.

He referred to the descriptions of angular flight movements, rapid turns and lack of sound in most sightings. "Putting them together, there's no question that there's something very serious going on," he said.

Bodner said the varieties of UFOs described were interesting. He said he had talked to a family of six in Rural Retreat whose members saw the same thing at the same time in the same place, but all described it differently.

"They even saw different-colored lights on it," he said.

He encouraged those who have sighted UFOs to fill out two-page forms that his organization uses to document sightings.

"It might be an optical illusion, it might be atmospheric conditions, anything," he said. "I'm not here to promote this, I'm here to investigate this."

Finney said the UFO phenomena she has studied in the past 20 years have included accounts of abductions, something that has not been reported in Wythe.

She said people will sometimes realize they cannot account for several hours of time from a week earlier, or find a strange scar on their body they have no memory of getting.