



**UFOs, TOO** — Visitors, extraterrestrial and otherwise, receive a warm welcome when they visit rural Wythe County.

For Gordon, there has been no satisfactory answer.

In November he set up "the first and only UFO conference in Southwest Virginia" at the Wytheville Community College. Four UFO ap-

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**WE SAW IT** — When those at the Wytheville UFO conference were asked to raise their hands if they had seen UFOs, nearly everyone did.

causals were invited to address the community. One of them, Leonard Stringfield, was hooked up to the meeting via telephone.

About 150 people jammed into the small auditorium, straining to hear every word. Residents got up and described their sightings while a local television camera flooded the room with its stark light.

After listening to several of the sighting reports, including one that described how a woman's dog was upset by the UFO, Stringfield (consid- ered by many "ufologists" to be one of the top experts), informed those who could hear his barely amplified voice that the craft they have been seeing "are definitely extraterrestrial in nature."

This revelation might have caused a fever in other communities, but those present only looked on calmly. Some nodded their heads.

Ufologist Barbara Finney got no more of a rise when she discussed how one can find out if he's been abducted by an extraterrestrial. "Look for a surgical scar on the back of the calf or knee...missing time... alien infections."

The cold atmosphere of alien spacecraft often causes alien problems, she explained. The scar marks the spot where the abduction victim was medically monitored.

Some in the audience asked ques- tions, but most looked as if they still weren't overly concerned about aliens from outer space.

Then ufologist Victor Jackson, who had traveled from San Antonio, Tex- as, for the meeting, addressed the crowd on the dangers of aliens, which he called "hostiles."

Some in the room whispered that Jackson, with his shaved head and melodic foreign accent, was himself an alien. The fact that he had been seen walking into town added fuel to the speculation.

Jackson warned those who see the UFOs "not to get too close. I'm not trying to scare you; I'm just trying to enlighten you."

Gordon closed the meeting by ab- scribing all those present who had seen a UFO to raise their hands. Nearly ev- eryone did.

With the coming of winter, most of the calls reporting UFOs have, like the brilliant fall leaves, "dried up and blown away," said Capt. K.L. Osborne of the Wythe County Sheriff's Department.

But while they lasted, the calls brought the department plenty of ex- citement. Judging from the smiles they still bring on, they're not likely to be forgotten for some time.

"You won't believe the calls," said Deputy Sheriff C.M. Collins, who

in convinced the UFOs are "Color choppers being refused."

Other smiling deputies came over to listen to what must have been one of their favorite stories: "One lady called and said a UFO had landed nearby. She said she knew it was a UFO because ... It's got it wrote on the side of it."

The investigating deputy "broke all speed records to get there," said Col- lins, a former Air Force paratrooper: "When he got there, she said it was just car lights."

On Wytheville's main drag sits the Red Barn, a large, old building whose antiques and collectibles are still. Owners Ed and Bonnie Dillon like to sit on the crowded porch, rocking in the sun and watching cars go by. What do they think about the Wythe UFOs?

"Well, now," said Dillon with a glance at his wife, "I don't think we've even discussed it, have we?"

Ed's wife smiled and shook her head. On the wall beside her chair, a sign reads: "Historical fact: On this spot, in 1891, as far as we know, nothing happened."

Perhaps one day Ed and Bonnie Dillon will have a hankering to change the date on that sign.



T-O photos by Mark Hummer

**THEY HAVE LANDED** — In the Wythe County Sheriff's office, the map of the county (population 25,000) shows that UFOs can be fun, even though more than 2,000 sightings were reported in Southwestern Virginia.