

Planetary conjunction is expected to confuse some sky watchers

By James W. Stehl
The Tribune Democrat

Upcoming astronomical events involving the moon and two planets might result in a rash of UFO sightings, according to the Pennsylvania Association for the Study of the Unexplained.

Stan Gordon of Greensburg leads the statewide volunteer scientific clearing house that conducts open-minded investigations of strange and unusual occurrences.

"If the skies are clear, sky watchers will have a real treat," Mr. Gordon said. "Various atmospheric conditions could make these celestial displays seem strange."

In the west southwest section of the sky, the planet

Venus has moved directly below the moon, now in a crescent shape, while Jupiter has assumed a position to the top left of the moon. The planets are the brightest "stars" in the night sky.

"The more interesting part will be the conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Venus," Mr. Gordon said.

He described a conjunction basically as the close pairings of two planets in the same area.

Special dates

Mr. Gordon recommended that people mark two dates on their calendar — Feb. 29 and March 5.

On the evening of Feb. 29, he said, Jupiter will be positioned at the top left of Venus. "They will be only five degrees apart," he added.

These types of events historically have led to numerous reports of UFO sightings.

However, the actual conjunction won't take place until the evening of March 5, when Venus passes 2.2 degrees north of Jupiter.

"This will give the impression of two brilliant lights in a straight line," Mr. Gordon said.

The conjunction several years ago resulted in a flood of calls from people seeking an explanation, Mr. Gordon said.

He also referred to another celestial highlight next summer, when Mars will intensify in brightness.

"This year Mars will make its closest approach to Earth in about 25 years. The planet will appear as a bright orange-reddish light in the eastern part of the sky. It will be on the opposite side of the Earth from the sun."

Although these are natural occurrences, Mr. Gordon noted, these types of events historically have led to numerous reports of UFO sightings.

"Atmospheric conditions can make the planet ap-

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Conjunction may appear to be a UFO

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pear to brighten and then dim, to suddenly appear and disappear, to move around in position and to change colors," the director said.

Currently, the agency is investigat-

Mr. Gordon operates a 24-hour Pennsylvania UFO hot line. The number is 412-438-7768.

ing what Mr. Gordon referred to as "quite a good low-level sighting" of an unidentified flying object in Somerset County.

Mr. Gordon said the incident happened at approximately 8:45 p.m. Feb. 10 on a back road near Blough.

"At least three carloads of people saw this thing," Mr. Gordon said.

According to the witness who filed the report, two vehicles behind him had stopped. The witness reported getting out of his vehicle and gazing at an object about 40 feet away and no more than 50 feet off the ground.

"It was as big as a house," Mr. Gordon said. "It was seen for quite a long period of time. There may in fact have been more than one object involved."

The witness reported hearing a humming sound as the object hovered above the ground. It emitted bright beams of light from one side toward the tops of trees in the woods it was illuminating, Mr. Gordon said.

He said he is eager to talk confidentially with the other witnesses.

moting the annual UFO Days celebration, put on by the Village of Elmwood each July.

"We want to make people aware of the fact that this involves three separate entities; the Village of Elmwood, the surrounding communities and the UFO Site Center Corporation, all which operate independently of one another."