

# Elmwood prepares for big UFO Days

By Jim Daly  
Regional editor

ELMWOOD — Whether unidentified flying objects will descend on Elmwood this summer is anybody's guess, but it seems certain that more people than usual will drop in for the village's annual UFO Days celebration in late July.

Elmwood rocketed into international fame in February when an organization called UFO Site Center Corp. announced plans to build a facility in the Elmwood area for sending signals to aliens.

Festival organizers and village officials already have received many inquiries from prospective terrestrial visitors about where they can stay during the celebration, according to Village President Larry Feiler and Tom Weber, president of the Elmwood Area Community Club. The club is a non-profit group that sponsors the festival.

"I had a letter the other day from a lady in Boston," Feiler said this week.

One potential visitor asked where a tent that could hold 40 to 50 people could be pitched, he said.

Weber said people even have asked about bus tours to areas of UFO sightings, tours "which, of course, we don't have."

UFO Days are scheduled for July 29, 30 and 31.

The first official UFO Days was held in 1979. The first two years of the festival drew large crowds because of the unusual theme based on the many UFO sightings in the Elmwood area, according to Weber.

In recent years, the celebration has been the focal point of reunions for people with Elmwood roots, he said. Up to 3,000 people have attended on each night, Weber estimated, adding that the large parade on Sunday always draws big crowds.

Weber doesn't know how much the publicity about the site center will affect this year's attendance, but he believes some increase is likely.

"It's unpredictable — the interest is naturally much greater because of the UFO Site Center," he said.

Both Feiler and Weber noted that the village and UFO Days have no connection with UFO Site Center Corp., a new organization based in Chippewa Falls. But plans are underway to address some of the problems created by curiosity about the project.

The Elmwood Village Board on Monday discussed converting an old village-owned utility pump-house into a visitor center staffed by volunteers. Local gas station owners and others who find themselves taking time to help visitors could refer them to the center, Feiler said.

"The building's got to be repainted," he said. Feiler said he has contacted an art teacher at Elmwood High School about the possibility of getting art students to help out.

In addition, the village may allow the UFO Site Center Corp. to use the auditorium at the village hall for displaying articles and



Tom Weber  
Raising funds for UFO project

news videotapes that have appeared since winter about the project.

Elmwood, a farming village of about 900, isn't geared for large-scale tourism. There aren't any motels, so inquirers are being referred to motels in Durand, Menomonie and Ellsworth. There are campgrounds at the village's Butternut Park, at Pierce County's nearby Nugget Lake County Park, and in Spring Valley and Eau Claire.

Weber said the Community Club intends to preserve the festival's family orientation despite the village's renewed fame. He noted that no hard rock bands have been booked in recent years, and that excessive drinking and fighting have been kept under control.

"We're working at it hard to keep that image," he said.

The village has just one full-time police officer — Gene Helmer — and five part-time officers. Pierce County reserve deputies help out during the festival.

Meanwhile, the proposed UFO center continues to attract international attention. UFO Site Center Corp. founder Tom Weber of Chippewa Falls (no relation to Tom Weber of Elmwood) said television crews representing broadcasters in Japan and Italy have contacted him. The project already has been the subject of "The Geraldo Show," a syndicated talk show.

Few details about where or what the project will entail have been divulged yet, although Site Center officials want to create a visual signal to let aliens know something about the human race. They also want to build a UFO research center.

The cost of the project could be up to \$50 million, Weber said at an April 16 conference about UFOs at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. Weber has said he wants no government help.

Site Center officials have talked about acquiring two square miles of

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## UFO site could cost \$50 million

● UFOs from Page 7A

land, preferably in the hilly areas above the village. They met with area landowners Sunday to ask them "to think about" potential sales for the project, Weber said. The Site Center has not acquired any land yet.

"We're kind of going to let them (the landowners) come forward," Weber said.

Fund-raising is the corporation's biggest project now, he said. Weber declined to say how much has been raised through donations.

"I don't think that would be appropriate," he said. Weber did say figures would be released sometime in the future.

The firm seems to have enough money to rent an office at 705 Bay St. in Chippewa Falls, however. The office is staffed by volunteers.

Feiler said the proposed UFO site center is the hottest topic of conversation in Elmwood. He recounted one joke circulating about Elmwood being the most famous town in Wisconsin: "Where's Madison, Wisconsin? Well, it's five hours south of Elmwood."

Otherwise the project has had little effect on the village, he said.

"I think the general public is taking it very much in stride."

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