

UFOs put Elmwood in headlines

No one in Elmwood was prepared for the avalanche of publicity that followed a proposal to build a landing strip for extra-terrestrial visitors in that village of 1,000 people. Addressing the Menomonie Rotary Club last week, Elmwood Mayor Larry Feiler said the whole thing "totally exploded" after the story reached the national wire service in February, 1988.

The UFO Site Center Inc., Chippewa Falls, headed by Tom Weber, is seeking to raise \$50 million to establish a large landing site in Elmwood. The site — lighted and designed to make space travelers feel welcome — would be manned by scientists from around the world, according to plans.

Feiler stressed that UFO Site Center Inc. is separate from the village of Elmwood. Because they are separate, Feiler could not say how much money has been raised so far. He offered an estimate of \$40,000.

Feiler also stressed to Rotarians that he was not at the meeting to convince anyone of the existence of UFO's.

"I don't care what anybody believes," Feiler said. "I'm not here to change anyone's mind. I do know there are a lot of things we can't explain out there."

Feiler cited several instances of unexplained phenomenon, including discovery of a mysterious aluminum-foil type metal at a crash site in Roswell, N.M. The foil was flexible and light, but could not be destroyed by hammering it with a mallet, he said. He also mentioned a certain airplane hangar that Sen. Barry Goldwater tried unsuccessfully for many years to get inside.

"I don't know if there's a broom and a bucket in there, or something else," Feiler said. "I only know no one has been able to get into that hangar."

Feiler was asked about the credibility of the sightings that took place in Elmwood some years ago. He replied that the people who reported sightings were very reliable, and that four or five people in a relatively small area had seen "basically the same thing."

The village renamed its "Stars and Stripes" celebration shortly after the sightings, and now hosts "UFO Days." Feiler said the village has printed maps showing where the sightings took place.

"You wouldn't believe how many people get those maps and go out to the sites," Feiler said.

It was partly because talk of UFO's is not unusual in Elmwood that Weber approached Feiler about locating the landing site there.

"I remember thinking, 'Is this guy serious, or has he been on wacky-tobacco?'" Feiler recalled. "I learned he was very serious."

The village board considered how the proposal would affect Elmwood, and the decision was made to approve the plan, Feiler said. Of the \$50 million price tag, Feiler remembers saying, "Yeah. A couple of weeks and a hell of a lot of bake sales."

Before the public was aware of the project an editor with the Eau Claire Leader had noticed a request in that paper made by Weber for information from people interested in UFO's. The Leader ran a story, based on an interview with Weber. The story was went out on the national wire service.

Letters and phone calls came flooding in, from around the United States and such countries as Spain, Canada, Italy and Australia, Feiler said. A press



Larry Feiler

conference was scheduled.

"We don't do that too often in Elmwood," Feiler said of the press conference.

That day KARE-TV in the Twin Cities called and said they were sending a crew in a helicopter. Then WCCO-TV called and said they were

sending a crew in a helicopter. WEAU-TV, Eau Claire, had scheduled an "exclusive" interview a half-hour prior to the conference, but ABC Television argued that that agreement was not in writing, so all stations and newspapers got the news at the same time.

Later, a crew spent three days filming in Elmwood for a piece used by national anchor Dan Rather. Later still, Feiler, Weber, and several Elmwood residents who had reported sightings were flown to New York where they appeared on Geraldo Rivera's talk show.

There have been many calls and letters from people irate about the proposed site, Feiler said. But he — as well as many villagers and the village board — believe the center can be an economic benefit to St. Croix, Pierce and Dunn counties. A lot of people are making a special point of coming to Elmwood since the publicity, and the campgrounds, hotels and restaurants in the area are beneficiaries, he said.

Some big names have shown interest in the project, according to Feiler. One man in New York offered several million dollars. He was turned down, however, because he also wanted to build a landing strip for his Lear jet at the site, as well as a private restaurant and other buildings, Feiler said.

"Mohammed Ali is very interested," Feiler said. "But, he's taken some awful blows to the head."

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