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The UFO question still topic for study

By Kathy Mellott

ALTOONA — A young man identified as Steve was sitting in his car with his girlfriend one night recently when a circular-type aircraft flashed into view.

The craft had a green light coming from its narrow tail that illuminated the interior of the car. It hovered over the Westfall Park area for two-to three minutes, then suddenly disappeared.

Steve, a maintenance man at Station Mall, was relating his experience to John Timmerman, vice president of public relations for the J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies. The center, based in Chicago, is one of two that monitor and record sightings of unidentified flying objects. The second organization is Mutual UFO Studies, based in Texas.

"We were sitting there in my girlfriend's driveway and it just appeared," Steve told Timmerman. "It came from nowhere, hovered near the car, then just disappeared."

Steve noted that his sighting was similar to one that took place in May. Two women reported that they were driving along Route 220 south of Altoona when they saw a greenish glow in the woods. It then approached the highway and passed over the car.

Timmerman, a Lima, Ohio, resident, listened intently to Steve. He nodded his head from time to time, indicating that similar sightings had been reported.

Steve produced a drawing depicting the craft. Timmerman pointed to a craft on the back of one of his extensive displays at the Station Mall and Steve nodded his head in affirmation.

The UFO expert spent the weekend at the mall talking to people, showing movies about UFOs and manning displays that depict some of the more-outstanding UFO sightings. What he really was hoping for was people who would come forward with information about sightings similar to Steve's and tangible evidence such as photographs.

"There is something going on out there," said Timmerman, who is a former heating and air conditioning contractor and now vice president of the savings division of South Side Savings Bank in Lima.

Timmerman is a UFO believer, even though he never has experienced a sighting.

"I've never seen anything myself," he said. "My wife hopes I do someday."

The Center for UFO Studies has 100,000 recorded sightings, reports considered worthy enough to record. All together, 13 million Americans say they have experienced a UFO, Timmerman said.

Timmerman said the mall's maintenance man had what has become known as a close encounter of the first kind.

A close encounter of the second kind is where physical traces are found, such as mysterious markings in a field or loss of hair or a physical injury to an observer.

A close encounter of a third kind is when contact is made with an alien.

The three designations were developed by the late J. Allen Hynek, founder of the UFO center, Timmerman said. Hynek, who died in 1983, was an astronomer and consultant to the movie, "Close Encounters of the Third Kind."

Timmerman became interested in UFOs after serving as a consultant for the Air Force's Operation Blue Book, which was disbanded in 1969. Timmerman said the results of the intensive investigations were inconclusive.

"The conclusion was that UFOs are not a threat to the security of the nation," he said.

One of the most-interesting encounters, Timmerman said, was in 1953 and involved an aircraft and its pilot, who disappeared off Australia.

"He was in radio contact with the people and disappeared with no trace of him or his aircraft," Timmerman said.

UFO sightings occur in waves, he said, with large numbers of sightings reported every three or four years beginning in 1952. It has been several years since there has been a rash of reports.