

Believers flock to UFO meeting

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Special to The Gazette

DRUMMONDVILLE — A marathon UFO conference brought out the curious and the converted yesterday.

"I saw one a couple of years ago after an electric rain storm," said Mary, who wouldn't give her real name.

"People think you're on another planet when you talk about this stuff," said the La Prairie housewife.

Mary and her companion drove 90 minutes from the South Shore to attend the one-day *Première Journée Internationale d'UFOlogie* at Drummondville's Hotel Universal.

"There are scientists here, they know what they're talking about," said the blonde, dressed in jeans and a jean jacket.

As others sat riveted listening to a representative from the RCMP describe the forces' experience with UFO reports, Mary — who describes her interest in the paranormal as "just a pastime" — said "I find it a little boring. I'm not hearing anything I haven't heard before. But it's good for those who don't know anything.

"There's more information in English than French so I came here to see what the French had to say," said Mary, who saw her first and only UFO four years ago.

Mary saw a small circular light come towards her from the sky. As it came closer, it broke into two, turned red and then vanished into thin air. Mary didn't report it, or tell many friends. "I told a couple of people and they thought I was crazy, so I stopped telling people."

Mary found comfort in books and television programs. "E.T. 101, I got it from a book club and it's better than all this

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stuff," she said pointing to the podium where Jean-Jacques Velasco, a scientist from France was addressing the audience of 500.

"This is all three-dimensional. You

have to go to the fourth and fifth dimension."

One person impressed by the conference was Bertrand Turcotte.

"I'm enjoying myself because I'm interested in finding information to see if it's real or not," said Turcotte during a smoke break at the conference, which featured speakers from France, the United States and Canada.

Unlike Mary, Turcotte has never seen an unidentified flying object. "My son saw one two years ago," said the technical consultant from Danville, west of Sherbrooke in the Eastern Townships.

Turcotte didn't bring his son or anyone else with him.

"I don't want my views to be influenced by anyone," he said, mulling over a cigarette. "I'm serious about it, but it's not my favorite hobby."

For François Bourbeau, the paranormal is more than a hobby; it's his life. The event's organizer has devoted his life to finding information on UFOs.

The 35-year-old Bourbeau saw his first UFO when he was 12. "I saw it in Drummondville and I took six pictures."

That was all it took to put Bourbeau on the trail of the UFO phenomenon. He's written two books on the subject; he says his latest, *Les Médias Cachent la Ralité OVNI au Public* is a best-seller. He's also the host of a French-language interview show, *Alter Ego Spiritus*, based in Drummondville but broadcast across the province on cable TV public-access channels.

He is also involved with OVNI-Alerte in Drummondville. The UFO-awareness organization has recorded numerous sightings across Quebec, the most significant being a 2½-minute sighting in Saint-Marjorique on July 27, 1992.

The image was recorded on video by Bourbeau, and, he said, detected by radar at Mirabel airport. "More and more people accept this," said Bourbeau, who was mocked by family and friends for 10 years before they became believers.

"A day like to day is very important to change people's minds about UFOs and the paranormal," said Bourbeau.

♣ If you've seen a UFO, contact OVNI-Alerte at 819-474-6864.