

## **UFO sighting brings media attention, investigative team to Southern Illinois**

by Heather Ratcliffe  
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It appeared as a floating two-story house with a glowing red interior.

A week later, it has attracted national media and a team of investigators led by a former FBI agent who wants to know if the object was an alien spacecraft.

John Velier and his team from Las Vegas flew to St. Louis on Friday to learn more about a UFO spotted a week ago first by a miniature-golf course owner in Highland and then by four police officers.

When it flew over Melvern Noll's head as he stood on his golf course about 4 a.m., the craft was traveling silently at a snail's pace. He said he saw at least two rows of windows and red lights inside the object and along its metallic dark belly.

"I kept my eyeballs on it," said Noll, 66. "It was all lighted up and so low that someone could have waved at me out the window." He estimated it was about 1,000 feet above the ground.

Noll said he drove to the Highland police station and asked the dispatcher to call the Lebanon police because the object was floating that way.

Besides Noll, four Metro East-area police officers saw the object as it moved above Lebanon, Shiloh, Dupon and Millstadt.

More than 20 calls about the sighting have been ringing into the Millstadt police station each day since it was first reported by the media Friday. Chief Ed Wilkerson posted his officers' report on the department's Web site along with the drawings and photo. He stopped media interviews, refusing inquiries from ABC News in New York and Extra, the tabloid TV news show.

"It's going to affect policing if we don't put a stop to it," he said. "I never thought anything like this would draw this much attention. Well, at least it puts Millstadt on the map."

Police in Millstadt don't believe the sighting was a visitor from outer space. But they won't make any assumptions about what it was either.

"This has been one of the biggest things we have experienced in this area. It's reached the world," Wilkerson said.

Velier's team came from the National Institute for Discovery Science, a Las Vegas research institute, to collect evidence of the sighting.

The institute, founded in 1995, has about a dozen former law enforcement officers and scientists investigating sightings professionally.

"We are using the scientific method," said Colm Kelleher, an administrator for the institute. "We are looking for facts, not trying to promote any agenda."

The institute sent a team to the Metro East area because of the overwhelming credibility of the witnesses - nearly all police officers, Kelleher said.

"Police officers are a higher-quality observers than other witnesses, because they have good memories," he said. "And from our initial calls, we know these people are not delusional."

Velier, who said he doesn't know if aliens exist or not, said he's now investigating about 136 cases of UFO sightings, as well as cattle mutilations.

He interviewed the police officers and Noll. He couldn't find any other witnesses.

"Usually we are inundated with people who have seen these objects," he said.

Velier won't make an assumption about what the officers saw yet because his investigation is still in its initial stages. However, he will post a preliminary report on the organization's Web site at [www.accessnv.com/nids](http://www.accessnv.com/nids) in a few weeks.

Two of the police officers who saw the object contacted the National UFO Reporting Center in Seattle the morning they spotted it, said Peter B. Davenport, the center's director. The center, founded in 1974, records, corroborates and documents reports from individuals who have witnessed unusual, possibly UFO-related events.

The descriptions of the flying object don't fit conventional aircraft, Davenport said. The lighting is not consistent with U.S. regulations, and the flight pattern characteristics exceed anything that could have been achieved with an airplane, Davenport said.

The center has also taken reports from at least two civilians in the area who saw the object while driving to work that morning. The center will not release their names.

Forest Crawford of Collinsville, assistant director of the Illinois Mutual UFO Network, said he believes the police officers saw an experimental government aircraft.

A couple of the police witnesses told reporters that the object resembled a drawing of a "stealth blimp" that appeared in Popular Mechanics magazine.

"That drawing is such a close match to what these guys described," Crawford said.

Davenport disputes the theory that the aircraft could have been a secret government "stealth blimp." The amount of power needed to generate the brilliant glowing lights would be generated from equipment too heavy for a blimp, he said.

Officials at Scott Air Force Base said Tuesday that the only knowledge they had of last week's UFO sighting was from news reports. The air traffic control tower for Scott and MidAmerica Airport was shut down at the time.

Noll said although the sighting has brought lots of unexpected calls and attention, he doesn't regret telling his story.

"I'm glad I saw it. Only once in a lifetime you get to see something so exciting," he said.