# UFO and paranormal conferences: Are they obsolete?

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Over the past year I’ve given numerous regional presentations about UFOs. Of the several hundred persons in attendance, the most noticeable feature of my audience was the significant gray hair of the attendees.

In 1979, The Buggles recorded a song titled “Video Killed the Radio Star,” with its meaning that radio had been king in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s until it was dethroned by television.

In the 1980s and 1990s, those interested in exploring the paranormal would have attended a gathering like a Fortean Society conference. If you were transgendered, you might have attended an annual convention hosted by the International Foundation for Gender Education.

Both conferences were more or less killed off by the rise of the internet, social media and easy access to information. One promoter lamented to me, “When just about any information you want can be found by using a globally connected phone in your pocket, why travel to a convention?”

Several other promoters also told me that “millennials seem to just accept UFOs as a real phenomenon; they seem to lack curiosity about the subject.”

For the record, many regional UFO conferences nationwide are doing very well. Since the Dec. 16 mainstream media revelation about the Pentagon’s UFO research, there has been a huge surge of curious newbies exploring the world of Ufology.

In an effort to bolster attendance at the [2018 MUFON Symposium](https://www.mufonsymposium.com/) in Cherry Hill, N.J., on July 27 through 29, the Mutual UFO Network is offering an unprecedented FREE Friday at the event. Jennifer Stein, the coordinator of this year’s symposium, told me that they are “offering the general public free presentations, access to their vendor suite, and free all-weekend access to their UFO film festival.” All of this is intended to be an outreach effort to the interested and curious general public, according to Stein.

Jan Harzan, executive director of MUFON, expressed to me his sincere hope that the “free Friday offering will boost symposium attendance and grow MUFON membership.”

Large conventions such as the [International UFO Congress](http://ufocongress.com/) in Arizona are also doing very well. In fact, the IUFOC held in February “completely outgrew” the resort casino they’ve been using for years. Next year they’ll be in a much bigger convention venue in downtown Phoenix, according to Alejandro Rojas, director of operations for Open Minds Production, which hosts IUFOC.

Closer to home, the long-running [Hudson Valley-Pine Bush UFO Fair](http://www.pinebushufofair.com/) in Ulster County (May 20) is presently the closest thing that Empire State residents have to a state-level conference.

“The festival is growing a little bit every year,” according to Pine Bush event coordinator Domanie Ragni for the Crawford Township, “It’s likely that we will be opening a UFO Museum and Paranormal Center in town very soon.”

This year’s Pine Bush Fair will host notable UFO and paranormal speakers as well as a parade and other events for the whole family. With the Pine Bush Fair growing, perhaps it will someday evolve into New York state’s premier UFO event.

Are UFO and paranormal conferences obsolete? Not for the foreseeable future. What do these conventions have that the internet feed on your cell phone doesn’t? In a word, a pulse.

People text and email me all the time with curious questions or advice on some aspect of Ufology. When I get these questions at a convention or conference, I walk that individual over to someone who can answer the question if I can’t. There’s nothing like up-close and personal interaction to get right to the heart of the matter. And in these days of surveillance, many people will say things verbally that they would not feel comfortable writing over a digital platform.

For those who want to be field investigators, MUFON features online classes and testing, plus MUFON usually hosts an all-day field investigator class prior to a convention. But you have to get in your car and attend a convention to meet these wonderful people.

And if you’re a hoping to be a UFO researcher, go to a regional or national UFO convention or symposium and start making some contacts.

Before my spouse and I ever thought of researching and publishing a seminal book on UFO statistics, there was an inspirational event that launched us. We were at a pre-banquet mixer and got into a very deep conversation with Dr. Gordon Spear. One thing led to another and six months later, fueled by some research that Dr. Spear requested us to look in to, we decided to write *UFO Sightings Desk Reference*.

Who knew up-close and personal social contact could lead to great things?

*Cheryl Costa was named Researcher of the Year 2018 by the International UFO Congress.*

**On The Road**

Cheryl’s future speaking engagements include:

* June 3, 2-3 p.m.: Community Library of DeWitt & Jamesville, Community Room 2
* Aug. 18: MUFON Conference, Bellville, Ohio
* Sept. 22: Syracuse Paranormal Conference, Syracuse