

Candidate hopes alien visit will not be an issue

By GREGORY ENNS
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Politician Lynne Plaskett is hoping her claim of a close encounter with an alien force won't mean a close encounter at the polls in November.

Plaskett, up for re-election to the Volusia County Council, said on national television Wednesday that an alien force hovered over her 21 years ago and cured her of cancer.

"Everyone who has called has said, 'You know I really believe what happened. You have a lot of guts coming out,'" she said.

Plaskett, a 46-year-old mother of six, made the claim on a *Maury Povich Show* that focused on unlikely people who say they were abducted or visited by aliens.

"This one is probably a first, at least to my knowledge in recent years in Florida," said Susan MacManus, a political science professor at the University of South Florida. "Maybe she has a lot of *Star Trek* constituency."

Plaskett said that after being diagnosed with T-cell lymphoma while living in California in 1975, an 8-inch disk appeared in her room and hovered over her body. Soon after, she said she was cured of cancer.

"I knew it wasn't God and I knew it wasn't of this Earth or anything I'm familiar with," she said.

Plaskett's opponent, former Port Orange Mayor Jim Ward, said he will not make the alien experience an issue in the campaign for the \$25,000-a-year job on the council governing the county on Florida's east coast.

"I'd rather compete with her on the campaign issues than these extraterrestrial things," Ward said.

Neither Ward nor Plaskett

could predict how the announcement might affect her at the polls. Both are registered Democrats, but the election is non-partisan.

Plaskett said she has been flooded with calls from the media and constituents.

"One gentleman called and wanted to know could his diabetes be cured," she said. "I said, 'I have no idea. You need to talk to your doctor.' He indicated to me he wanted to know if there was a way he could contact some other life form."

Dr. Gary Posner, founder of Tampa Bay Skeptics, said his group would offer Plaskett \$1,000 if she could prove her claim. That offer, in fact, is made to anyone with a paranormal claim.

"If someone claimed to be miraculously cured (by) cancer, others may forsake genuine medical treatment in favor of paranormal therapy," Posner said.

Posner also gave a political view of Plaskett's claim.

"Some people may vote for her as a result of what they perceive to be an honest and courageous announcement about what happened to her," he said. "Others might take another view and wonder about how rational her political decisions might be based upon this bizarre-sounding claim regarding her UFO experience."

Plaskett said the Povich show contacted her after another panelist told producers about her. The panelist and Plaskett met at a Mutual UFO Network meeting last year. She said she went on the show because she wanted to speak honestly about her experience.

"I would just hope people would separate the two issues," she said.

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