



The sport of ballooning and the travel industry are experiencing major milestones as the first balloon festivals in the nation are celebrating their 50th anniversaries. The Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta, the world's largest and oldest event turned 50 in October of 2022. Just one year later, The Adirondack Hot Air Balloon Festival will celebrate its 50th as the largest event on the East Coast of the United States and the third largest event in the nation.

Alburquerque draws 600 balloons and is one of our nation's largest tourist attractions with close to 5 Million people attending over the 9 day event. The Great Reno Balloon race is questionably second with 90 to 100 balloons and 125-150,000 spectators. Our event has had 90 to 100 balloons and attendance from 100 to 150,000 weather permitting. The Balloon Federation of America gives the nod to Reno because they have a larger number of pilots who reside in the host city of Reno than we do in Queensbury, NY Our ability to host and organize this event as compared to the events held in 2 very large population based cities in our nation is no small feat and one I hope is not taken for granted.

Other comparisons are important to note as well. The Budget for Alburquerque exceeds \$10 Million Dollars with a paid staff exceeding 50 people. Reno's budget exceeds \$2 Million Dollars with 10 paid staff. The Pro Football Hall of Fame Balloon Fiesta in Youngstown, OH hosts 40 balloons, with 10 paid staff and a budget of \$1.5 Million. Our event operates with no paid staff, roughly 20 key volunteers and a budget of \$200,000,(for our Golden Anniversary, we hope to increase that to 300,000 to cover special events), quite a remarkable feat.

I defer somewhat to share my story as to why I do this and put so much of myself into it. I have 2 passions in my life: Supporting and advocating for people with disabilities and...hot air ballooning. I just ended a 30 plus year career in Human services. For close to 25 years, I was part of the amazing CWI (Community , Work and Independence, INC) family first as Chief Financial Officer and then being appointed President and CEO 12 years ago. I am now a consultant with the NY Alliance, the largest disability advocacy group in NYS. I was their Board chair for the 5 years prior. I had the honor of being CEO at CWI and planning their 50th Anniversary celebration and gala as well as its first fundraisers in our community. I can tell you from leading one of our region's 10 largest employers and the balloon festival, that Covid has changed our community, and fundraising for not for profits has gotten much harder. Tight budgets, staffing crisis, business closures and more make it much harder to raise funds today.

On a lighter, brighter note, I attended the very first balloon festival at the ripe old age of 2!! Yes, in a stroller. In 1973, my mother started a scrapbook for me of this new event called the Adirondack Balloon Festival. That scrapbook still builds today after 50 years. I took my first balloon ride at this event when I was 10 years old. My first lesson as a student pilot was on my 14th birthday, the youngest possible date to do so. I became a balloon pilot one month after graduating from graduate school and we bought a balloon, I say "we" as the balloon was named "Family Affair" as my parents and all my siblings contributed. It became a family sport for us travelling the country and flying on our vacations. The culmination of this dream though was to fly in this event and that dream came true in 1994. On Friday afternoon from ACC, my sister and I launched from the college and 35 minutes later landed in Durkeetown, a lifelong dream achieved for this 24 yr old. We flew one more time that weekend and that was very special too, as it was the last time I flew in this event. One month later, I was asked to join the Board of Directors for the festival and the following year 1995, I took over all flight operations. My involvement in organizing this event is approaching 30 years.

Bringing us back to today, our committee has many fabulous ideas for the 50th but so much will depend on community support and occupancy tax funding. This is all confidential and it is my hope it can stay this way as some of it may not even happen if we don't have the funding. We hope to kick off the event a day early this year on Wednesday with a special Anniversary celebration at Hiland Park. This will be a non formal cocktail reception to celebrate the anniversary. It will be for our business community and sponsors, balloonists and our community in general. We will be giving awards and acknowledgements to some of our sponsors, with more than 10 being with us over 40 years and another 2 being with us all 50 years, Glens Falls National Bank and Suburban Propane. In addition we have asked local artist Lynn Benevento from Lake Luzerne to create her rendition of what the 50th anniversary should look like. This painting will be unveiled and later auctioned off to benefit the balloon festival. We will also create lithograph in a limited addition to sell as a fundraiser for the event. This event will end with a Moonglow on Hilands golf course so it can be enjoyed inside or outside by guests. The event will have nostalgia for all to enjoy. We intend to invite all of our veteran and retired [pilots to this year's event as well including some of those who were here in the first years. We hope to have some of the early participating balloons, long dead and retired and sitting in people's garage, inflated over the weekend for people to see if the FAA will allow us to. On Thursday midday we hope to host a luncheon for these early pioneers who helped create our event and make it what it is today. It is our hope to have this at SUNY Adirondack's new event center to tie the college back into the event as it was in the early years. We had asked {President Christine Duffy her thoughts on having balloons on campus for the celebration. After discussion with her key staff, they decided too much change has happened at the college which would not make it possible. Having this luncheon there is a nice alternative to having the college involved. Thursday's opening ceremony will start with a kickoff parade from downtown Glens Falls to Crandall Park and we hope to have balloon chase vehicles in the Parade. Due limited to space and safety concerns we will limit Thursdays launch to 15 balloons but will feature the birthday cake balloon with a 50th banner on it. Friday morning is our non publicized flight for media and press. If the news day allows, all 4 Albany based stations will generally go live with us, however

any breaking news will trump us. In addition, WCAX out of Burlington will attend as well. They cover Northern NY and from Rutland north in Vermont.

We hope to have all pilot's credentials reviewed by the FAA in time for all balloonist to fly Friday evening. Saturday morning will be another anniversary event featuring a Dawn Patrol flight. This is very unique to the East Coast but popular out west. It requires additional FAA approvals but I have had the concept verbally approved. About 30 minutes prior to sunrise, 5 to 10 balloons will inflate in the dark, similar to our huge moonglow in the evening, except, these balloons will launch in the dark. It will be a truly unique sight to see. These balloons will fly 30 to 45 minutes and land once the sun rises. Our regular launch will occur after sunrise.

Midday we are putting out feelers about an antique car show and we will also be hosting our balloons teams for an anniversary bbq. Our friends at Stewart's have verbally agreed to create an ice cream in our honor this year for the community to enjoy. This will also be shared with the pilots after their bbq.

We are also in early discussions with Price Chopper to consider being our baker of birthday cupcakes to be given to our visitors on a limited basis as it would be impossible to give on to all attending. Saturday evenings launch and Moonglow will then follow the public celebration.

Sunday morning's launch will be the raindate for the Dawn patrol. Exciting buzz in the balloon community is that Ruth Lind has agreed to come. Ruth is a pioneer female pilot and flew here in the 70's through about 2010. Since then she has become the voice of the Albuquerque Balloon fiesta. She serves as master of ceremonies and shares the launches with the crowds giving tidbits about ballooning and the pilots. You can watch this on Youtube. She will be here to announce our launches this year FREE OF CHARGE for what she calls the best ballooning event she ever attended.

There is much more I can share and would be happy to if you wish to meet with us in person. I do ask that this remain confidential as we wont release this information for many months and some things are dependent on funding.

On behalf of our Board of Directors and all volunteer organizing committee, we thank you for your support.

Sincerely;



Mark Donahue  
Chairperson, Board of Directors