

Plans continue for Balloons Over Vermilion

Sponsors step up, entertainment set for July's inaugural event

- BY JENNIFER BAILEY jbailey@dancornnews.com
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- Commercial-News File Photo

Balloons Over Vermilion will see hot air balloons again rise over the area this summer after a 15-year absence. The event was announced during a press conference in January, above, at Vermilion Regional Airport.

DANVILLE — More and more excitement is building as Balloons Over Vermilion draws closer to taking off in July.

Sponsorships were quickly reached for all 30 hot air balloons and also are coming along for different areas at the Vermilion Regional Airport. An entertainment lineup has been announced, community activities are being planned to lead up to the July 15-16 event and admission and parking prices have been set.

"It's been such a thrill to see the community response to this. It's a real good indicator of how much they miss the old (Balloon) Classic," said Linda Bolton, one of the organizers.

Bolton said businesses have been very supportive.

"There's so much interest in the event; so many smiles on faces that it was coming back," Bolton said.

There is a change in focus for this new event to make it more community and Vermilion County oriented.

"It's for the entire county, not just Danville," Bolton said.

Organizers announced the return of a hot air balloon event to the area in January. The title sponsor of the event for the next five years is the Julius W. Hegeler II Foundation which has provided \$100,000.

Co-chairman of the event, Pat O'Shaughnessy said the community, individuals, families and businesses, have stepped up to rebuild a hot air balloon event.

Site work and parking preparations continue at and near the airport with Danville Public Works Director Doug Ahrens and his crew, Bolton said. Bus shuttles and outlots will be used for parking. The push is for the public to use these nearby lots to park and take the free transportation and not pay to park.

Admission has been set at \$5 a person and \$5 a vehicle for parking at the airport. Those who take the bus will receive a food coupon.

Bolton said it's nice to have some younger people involved too with "younger legs and new ideas" to help out.

Bolton added that they've also had to work around the plane schedules at the airport, including a crop duster and UPS plane, for the event. She said "a lot of infrastructure was pulled" at the airport and organizers are making sure there is enough lighting and Internet service.

"Everybody has stepped up and has helped," she said.

O'Shaughnessy also said the fencing, electrical and plumbing infrastructure are no longer there like they were for the past Balloon Classics.

"We're starting from scratch," he said.

The stage and other areas will be run by generator. The airport also is trying to get the tower lit, O'Shaughnessy said. The event will use the south third of the airport due to the commercial air traffic, he added. There also are fewer parking areas since more of the land being farmed, O'Shaughnessy said. But they have 2,700 parking spaces identified.

He also added they are encouraging visitors to use the buses that will travel back and forth from about five or six sites along the Bowman Avenue corridor.

Bolton added that this new event will have a "much smaller footprint" than Balloon Classics of the past. But she said the public will have a much more up close and personal view of the hot air balloons and the glows and ascensions and fly ins.

On the ground will be food and beverage vendors, a beer tent, family and other areas including a handicapped-accessible balloon.

Activities will include a balloon school, tethered rides, sand volleyball tournament, face painting, canvas art painting, character drawing, Joyful Bubbles, bounce houses and the city's media monster will show a movie. There also will be an antique car show and more excitement to be announced later, Bolton said.

In Other News: Hot air balloon festival in New Mexico takes flight

There will be entertainment and activities Friday, July 15, and Saturday, July 16, afternoon to evening.

There will be morning flights around the community with multiple site lift offs and nothing at the airport Saturday morning. Bolton said county residents will be able to look up wherever they live and likely see a balloon.

There will be balloon glows at night on July 15 and July 16, and a mass ascension the night of July 15 and fly in Saturday night.

Organizers are going to Tia Peterson's fourth grade classroom at Bismarck-Henning Elementary School on Thursday for a balloon segment and the students will present a poster they made for the event. The fourth-graders are serving as host students for this year's Balloons Over Vermilion. The students also will sing a song with state Rep. Chad Hays' band,

the Boat Drink Caucus on the night of July 15.

Other events around the community to begin kicking off the event start June 18.

An inaugural pin with the Balloons Over Vermillion logo also is now on sale at the Danville Area Convention and Visitors' Bureau and Vermillion County Title.

"It sets the tone for the new event," Bolton said of the pin.

She said social media will be important for the event to learn about any parking difficulties and other event details and potential changes.

"We're really looking forward to it," she said of the new community event.

Entertainment announced includes Steve Rodman & Rodman Rail to kick things off July 15 followed by state Rep. Chad Hays' Boat Drink Caucus. Friday night will be headlined by 90's Daughter.

Saturday, July 16, will open up with area favorites: El Guapo, The Bob Schifo Band and Katapult. Saturday evening will be headlined by two exciting reunions — My Brother's Keeper will bring its blues and soul music back to central Illinois with special guest James Jones on lead guitar. Closing out this year's festivities will be "the return of Willard Cratchelow," featuring the legendary local band line-ups during the past 25-plus years.

Specific times for the bands can be found at the event's website:

<http://balloonsoververmillion.com>. Information also can be found on Facebook and Twitter.

Coming Up

These communities are planning to host their own community events built around a hot air balloon. Activities will vary from town to town but each will offer up close views of a balloon and equipment, a balloon tether and a balloon glow along with a chance to win a balloon ride.

June 18: Hoopston, Sidell and Bismarck

June 25: Potomac

July 2: Georgetown

July 4: Rossville

July 8: Oakwood

July 9: Danville Dans game