

**BALLOONS OVER VERMILION**

# Festival's forecast: Favorable

Storms threatening  
Friday's warm-up act,  
but predictions call  
for sun over weekend

By **TRACY CRANE**  
tcrane@news-gazette.com

DANVILLE — As balloonmeister of this weekend's Balloons Over Vermilion event, Joe Vincent doesn't dwell too much on the weather forecast.

The former balloon pilot makes

the final call on whether the field of 34 hot air balloons fly, and he cautions that conditions can change quickly.

But the National Weather Service's outlook is looking good less than 48 hours before the first launch, set for 6:30 p.m. Friday at the Vermilion Regional Airport.

Today's forecast (rain and thunderstorms) doesn't bode well for the warm-up act — the Danville boat club's Splash and Dash over Lake Vermilion, starring a handful of balloon pilots.

But by kickoff of the official Bal-

loons Over Vermilion festival at 3 p.m. Friday, the outlook calls for mostly sunny skies, a high of 83 and winds of 5 to 7 mph. Saturday looks promising, as well.

"I've got to make the tough decision to fly or not fly, and hope I do right," said Vincent, a Danville-area business owner with about 20 years experience in ballooning.

Last year brought perfect conditions for tethered balloon rides, one of the event's most popular attractions.

**Please see BALLOONS, C-3**

## BALLOONS

Continued from C-1

More than 350 people went up for a short ride, and "some waited over four hours," said Tony Sandlin, a commercial balloon pilot whose business, Midwest Balloon Rides of Fishers, Ind., offered the paid rides in 2016.

This weekend, Sandlin is bringing two balloons that will take patrons up — about 80-100 feet above the airport grounds — on Friday and Saturday nights, between 6:30 p.m. and 10.

"We're hoping they will have the same experience, but they will not have to

wait as long," said Sandlin, who has flown extensively in the U.S. and Canada and even internationally, including the Middle East and Mexico.

His balloons come with doors, allowing people to walk into the basket rather than climbing over the side. That not only saves time getting riders in and out, but also enables those who can't physically climb into a balloon to enjoy the experience, too.

The festival's main attraction starts Friday night with the field of 32 regular-shaped balloons and two specially shaped

ones set to launch from the airport grounds between 6:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

Between 5:45 and 6:30 a.m. Saturday, the balloons will launch from various spots around the Danville area, depending on wind, and fly as close as possible over a target slightly southeast of the intersection of Poland Road and North Vermilion Street.

And on Saturday night, the pilots are set to fly into the airport between 6:30 and 7:30 p.m. A balloon glow is scheduled for both nights, beginning at 8:30.

Vincent said his "tiny part" in the event doesn't begin until Friday, but he's thrilled he's part of it.

"It's a great gig," he said.