



## ***Balloons Will Be Back in 2017*** ***Save the Date!***

### **NEWS RELEASE**

**For Immediate Release**

**August 17, 2016**

**Contacts: Pat O'Shaughnessy 217-260-6716 or Jim Anderson 217-304-3032**

Following a very successful first event in 2016, ***Balloons Over Vermilion*** will return in 2017. "We are encouraging everyone to mark their 2017 calendars for July 14 and 15 for another great hot air ballooning event at Vermilion Regional Airport," says co-organizer Jim Anderson. Co-organizer Pat O'Shaughnessy says the community supported the event both financially and with their enthusiasm. "We were amazed at how excited everyone was to see hot air balloons return to Vermilion County, as local sponsors stepped up and people from across the area came to enjoy the event," he says.

"It was extremely important to our Steering Committee from the very outset of event planning that ***Balloons over Vermilion*** would be conscientious with sponsor dollars, providing quality entertainment for our guests while ensuring local vendors and service providers would be paid in full and on time; these goals were not only met, they were surpassed, and for that we are proud of the committee and thankful to the sponsors," O'Shaughnessy says.

"With the financial support we received from grants and local business partners to make this first event happen, we are ready to look ahead," Anderson says, adding, "Of course none of this would be possible without the generous five year donation of secured funding we received from the Julius W. Hegeler II Foundation." Both Anderson and O'Shaughnessy say they will again look to local partner sponsors to help make the 2017 event equally successful.

Crowds estimated in excess of 20,000 people attended the first hot air balloon event in Vermilion County in fifteen years. "We always had thousands attend the old event, but with a fifteen year gap, we had no idea how the community would respond and if they would come join us; but they did, with enthusiasm and excitement like we have not seen in years," O'Shaughnessy says. Local balloon pilot host Larry Owen agrees, saying, "I've never seen so many people watching us fly as we had on Friday night of the event; the chase crews had a hard time getting by all the cars parked on the roads. It was the same on Saturday morning, as thousands watched the balloons inflate and take off from several various locations around

Danville and attempt to hit targets located at Danville Country Club and The Danville Soccer Complex,” Owens continued.

Traffic and parking worked well for this new event. “Our volunteer crews did a great job of getting thousands of vehicles in and out of the airport without delays, and people embraced using the shuttle bus system we put in place to help offset some of that traffic,” O’Shaughnessy says. “It was a perfect combination of those riding the bus and those who chose to drive to the airport; they all left without delays and with smiles on their faces,” he added.

Even without any rain to worry about, organizers had to grapple with wind issues, but that did not stop pilots from entertaining the crowds. Local balloon pilot host Dean Carlton stated, “We had a good flight Friday night but without wind on Saturday our plans for a mass flight just could not work, so instead pilots inflated for one of the best balloon glows any of us have ever seen, and then we took down the ropes so people could walk out among the balloons; it was just spectacular. The pictures we have seen and the memories created on Saturday night were fantastic, as youngsters were invited into the gondolas by the pilots and the smiles just kept coming,” he added.

“Saturday morning turned out to be particularly exciting for Christopher Adkins, a young man with disabilities who became the first individual with a disability to ride over Vermilion County in a hot air balloon when he was treated to a ride in Tony Sandlin’s special handicap accessible balloon,” O’Shaughnessy says. The local AMBUCS group arranged the flight and surprised Adkins with the news just minutes prior to the balloon being launched. Adkins and his family flew for over an hour Saturday morning and landed safely near Catlin with a lifetime of memories. Sandlin was also tethered at the airport during the event offering rides late into the night to keep up with requests, allowing people who have never felt the sensation of lifting off the ground to do so in safety in Sandlin’s special balloon, including 35 children with disabilities and their parents.

Prior to the airport event, **Balloons Over Vermilion** partnered with communities across Vermilion County to feature a hot air balloon at events/fundraisers which the communities arranged. **Balloons Over Vermilion** provided each event with a balloon ride for two which each event could then raffle off to raise funds for local projects. “These events not only helped seven communities raise money for projects within their community, it helped raise awareness of the balloon event to follow at the airport, and truly made **Balloons Over Vermilion** a county wide event”, Anderson says.

“We wanted this event to be new and to be about the kids and making people smile, so we tried some non-traditional things, like partnering with a 4<sup>th</sup> grade class at Bismarck-Henning. We did community events across the county so people could get up close to a balloon and raise

money for their events, and we offered handicapped accessible tether rides in a special balloon at the airport. We introduced Balloon School to the children of Vermilion County and when we couldn't get balloons in the air on Saturday night, we did an extended glow and let people walk out among the 33 balloons. With tens of thousands of smiles and memories as the result, this was just a great event with super volunteers who worked extremely hard to make it happen. We can't wait to do it again," O'Shaughnessy says.

###

Just a few comments from the feedback we have received:

*"Without the organizers and sponsors, this event would not have happened. This is another great example of something good about Danville and Vermilion County."*

*"You and your team did a fantastic job. THANKS!"*

*"We are so appreciative that you asked us to be part of the spectacular event. It brought back many memories for many of us and made new ones for so many. Well done my friends and looking forward to next year!"*

*"We had guests here from Pennsylvania and they were overwhelmed with the event and the hospitality of our community ....words alone cannot express our appreciation of the efforts of so many....."*

*'Thank you so much for all your hard work and dedication. You guys are awesome! Just another reason to say I'm proud to live in Vermilion County"*

#####