



News Release

For Immediate Release

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We are welcoming the return of hot air balloons to the skies over Vermilion County, Illinois! For many years, Vermilion County hosted one of the premiere hot air balloon events in the country, Balloon Classic Illinois. "And for the last fifteen years, the people of Vermilion County have repeatedly expressed their desire to see hot air balloons return to our skies; after much careful thought and planning, a local group of volunteers has come together to make it happen this summer," says co-organizer Pat O'Shaughnessy.

The new event, titled, "***Balloons Over Vermilion***", will be held at the Vermilion Regional Airport on **July 15 and 16, 2016**. "This is a totally new event for our community," O'Shaughnessy says. "And we want this to be an event for all, so, we will be featuring hot air balloon activities across the county this summer, leading up to the airport event in July," he says. In addition, the group of community volunteer organizers, led by O'Shaughnessy and Jim Anderson, are focusing the new event on children and families, education, and on accessibility for all.

During the summer, leading up to the airport event, activities are being planned in communities across Vermilion County in which hot air balloons will be featured. The balloons will visit several sites in the county. "Pilots have agreed to help us build some excitement about the event by going into communities to set up for local events; each community will determine what kind of event they want to create," O'Shaughnessy says. At this point, organizers say they know Oakwood, Bismarck, Potomac, Hoopeston and Georgetown are already planning their events for the summer, with more information and sites to be announced soon. Each of the events will center on a hot air balloon that will be on site in each community and weather permitting will inflate and tether so people can get a close up view of the envelope and its basket. "Additionally, each of the communities will be able to raffle off a hot air balloon ride (to be provided at a future date), as a fundraiser for their own community projects, O'Shaughnessy says. Dates, locations and times of these community events will be announced on the ***Balloons Over Vermilion*** website, at balloonsoververmilion.com and on their **FACEBOOK** page at ***balloons over vermilion***.

A hot air balloon is also scheduled to fly over Danville Stadium on **Saturday, July 9th** to throw out the first pitch of the Danville Dans baseball game from the balloon's gondola. On **Thursday, July 14th**, the Danville Boat Club will host the popular Splash and Dash event over Lake Vermilion.

Because organizers are focusing the event on kids, Mrs. Tia Petersen's 4th grade class at Bismarck Henning Elementary School has been invited to be the host students for the event. The students are joining organizers to announce the event and to release the first balloons of the **2016 Balloons Over Vermilion**. "We are excited to partner with Bismarck Henning Elementary School and Mrs. Petersen's class as they become ambassadors for the event, acting as 'hosts' for airport activities on July 15 and 16. On Friday July 15, the students will join Representative Chad Hays and his band to perform a song for the crowd. This spring, the Bismarck Henning students will design a poster to be used to promote the event. They will then proudly wear shirts displaying their poster, proclaiming them as onsite airport 'balloon event hosts'. Co-organizer Jim Anderson says the students have another task. "We are asking these students to help us plan and design the children's activity area on the airport grounds, so that when they and other kids attend, they can enjoy what we have available; kids know what they have fun doing much better than adults," he says.

A new feature for the 2016 event is a **Balloon School for Kids** at the airport on Saturday afternoon. Youngsters will be able to walk inside a partially inflated balloon envelope and learn how hot air balloons operate. "Our focus, as we build this new event, is kids and to be able to give them this unique opportunity to have fun while they learn is great," O'Shaughnessy says.

Volunteer organizers say they are especially excited about a new and unique balloon that will be on the grounds Friday and Saturday. **Balloons Over Vermilion** will feature a **wheelchair-accessible balloon** capable of holding multiple wheelchairs. This special balloon, piloted by Tony Sandlin (www.midwestballoonrides.com) will be tethered on the airport grounds during regular hours so that those who have never been able to step into a balloon gondola or feel the sensation of lifting off the ground can have this experience (if weather prohibits the balloon being inflated, individuals will still be able to enter the balloon basket and pose for pictures). "It is very important to all of us who are working to organize this new event that we make it as open and accessible to everyone as we possibly can; for us, this is about **balloons for everyone**," Anderson says.

Thirty balloons will participate in the inaugural **Balloons Over Vermilion**, including some special shape balloons. Local pilots Larry Owen and Dean Carlton will be the host pilots for the event, and pilot Joe Vincent will serve as Balloonmeister.

Title sponsor for **Balloons Over Vermilion** is the Julius W. Hegeler II Foundation. "We could not possibly do any of this if it were not for the many local people who have stepped up to make the event possible for our community," O'Shaughnessy says. Sponsorships are now available at a variety of levels; anyone seeking information about becoming a sponsor should contact Pat O'Shaughnessy at 260-2716.

Gates for **Balloons Over Vermilion** at Vermilion Regional Airport will open the afternoon of Friday July 15th, with a mass ascension planned that evening at approximately 6 pm. Bands will be performing on the airport grounds both nights, including State Representative Chad Hays and his Boat Drink Caucus

band performing on Friday night, (with Mrs Petersen's Bismarck Henning students joining the band on stage for a song). Food vendors will be on the grounds during event hours Friday evening and Saturday afternoon and evening. The Children's Activity Area will be open during regular event hours. Balloons will return to the airport following their flight out of the airport on Friday night for an always-popular Balloon Glow.

There will be no activities at the airport on Saturday morning, July 16, but balloons will launch from various sites across the Danville area. Sites for launch, based on wind currents, will be announced as soon as they are determined, allowing spectators opportunities to watch lift off, as well as to see the balloons fly overhead and land at various sites in the area.

Gates at the airport will re-open Saturday afternoon, with antique cars from the Illiana Antique Car Club on display. The **Balloon School for Kids** will be held Saturday afternoon. Balloons will fly into the Vermilion County Airport around 7 on Saturday night and set up for another glorious balloon glow on the airport grounds.

Information is available on the event's website and will be updated regularly at www.balloonsoververmilion.com and on their **Facebook** page at **Balloons Over Vermilion**, as well as Instagram at **BalloonsOverVermilion**, and Twitter at **BalloonsOverVC**. Questions can be directed to the event's email at: balloonsoververmilion@gmail.com, and there is a toll free phone number to call with questions, **1-800-383-4836**. "We will be posting bios and pictures of pilots and their balloons as we move through the summer, so people will have an opportunity to learn more about the people who will be flying across our skies," O'Shaughnessy says.

"We are excited to be able to bring this event to Vermilion County, and we know the community will join Mr. Hegeler and Mrs. Petersen's 4th graders in supporting it; for all of us, this is about putting smiles on the faces of our kids and creating an event that is focused on **balloons for everyone**," O'Shaughnessy says.

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