

# Balloons Over Vermilion plans events

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Provided photo

Photo Provided Jessica Alyea's third-grade class at Northeast Elementary Magnet School earlier this month about what it means to be a student ambassador class for the event. The event will take place at the Vermilion Regional Airport.



DANVILLE — New events and a new student ambassador class will join the more than 30 hot air balloons expected to be a part of the second annual Balloons Over Vermilion.

The July 14-15 event will again take place at the Vermilion Regional Airport.

Last year's inaugural event was a learning experience for organizers after not having a hot air balloon event in the community for 15 years. Organizers say plans are coming along nicely for the second annual Balloons Over Vermilion.

"It's for the kids," said event co-chair Pat O'Shaughnessy.

Organizers recently with the help of Northeast Elementary Magnet School Principal Kelly Truex surprised and selected a new student ambassador class for the 2017 hot air balloon festival.

Chosen for this year's event is Jessica Alyea's third-grade class from Northeast Elementary Magnet School. Bismarck-Henning Elementary School teacher Tia Petersen's fourth-grade class served as the first hosts and ambassador class.

O'Shaughnessy said the student ambassadors add to the giddiness and child-like excitement for the event.

Event co-chairs O'Shaughnessy and Jim Anderson surprised the class earlier this month by issuing an invitation in person. The children enthusiastically accepted even after being informed that there was homework that went along with the privilege; the fun kind of homework.

They learned about ballooning from pilots Dean Carlton and Larry Owen, who treated them to trading cards that showed off each of their balloons. The class already has jumped into its role as student ambassadors by brainstorming what kids like best and what they want to see in the Kids Zone, with that area's co-chairs Jaclyn Vinson and Samantha McCoy.

The Northeast class and entire school will participate in a Balloon School event where a hot air balloon will be inflated outside, prior to the event in July. The students also will help with a mural.

New for the 2017 Balloons Over Vermilion will be two performances by the Jesse White Tumbling Team on July 15. Founded by Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White and Zach Mitchell, the team consists of youth acrobats who must maintain certain academic standards in order to qualify and be a part of the high flying troop. The Jesse White Tumbling Team makes more than 1,500 performances a year, has been in several movies and can be frequently seen during half-time shows for the National Basketball Association, the National Football League and Major League Baseball games.

"We are really excited to welcome the Jesse White Tumbling Team," Anderson said through a press release. "Their youth oriented program is a great fit for our event."

O'Shaughnessy added, "we're thrilled they will come down."

He said they've not been in this area for quite some time.

Also new to the 2017 line up, a Bell 47 Helicopter similar to the one seen in the television series MASH will be offering rides for a fee.

"Flying in a Bell 47 means you can see just about everything around you" said Jaime Samuell, who operates Sierra Aeronautics, through the press release. "The safety of our passengers will always be our priority."

Returning for a second year will be the tethered hot air balloon rides. A second handicap accessible balloon will be added this year to accommodate more rides.

"We knew there was a pent up demand for balloons and rides but clearly we underestimated that desire," O'Shaughnessy said. "Tony Sandlin, pilot of the handicap accessible balloon was one of the hardest working guys at the event last year. He and his team did their best and flew extended hours to get everyone in who wanted a ride."

This year plans are under way to develop a signage system to number rides purchased and show what ride is flying, so the wait in line is drastically reduced.

O'Shaughnessy said this year they will try pre-selling the tickets through the David S. Palmer Arena box office so someone will have a numbered flight and not have to wait in long lines.

The event also is adding additional food vendors, with the goal being about 35 vendors this year up from 19 last year; and the band line up is being finalized. Information about participating in either capacity is available on Balloons Over Vermilion's Facebook site [www.facebook.com/BalloonsOverVermilion](http://www.facebook.com/BalloonsOverVermilion). Information also is available at the website [balloonsoververmillion.com](http://balloonsoververmillion.com).

"Balloons only fly in the mornings and at night," O'Shaughnessy said. "We're trying to fill it in with different things kids and adults will like."

The car show, sand volleyball, Danville Art League activities and knocker balls will return, and there will be more bounce houses.

“The Kids Zone will be bigger and better,” O’Shaughnessy said.

The stage for bands will be moved a little to be more accessible for loading and unloading of equipment. The beer tent also will be inside the fenced-in entertainment area.

O’Shaughnessy said there also will be more tents and rest areas for shade.

Parking and busing people to the event from Wal-Mart, Lowe’s and Heavenly Square will stay the same.

There will be community events leading up to Balloons Over Vermilion again throughout Vermilion County. They’re in the planning stages.

“They all went off very well,” O’Shaughnessy said about the county-wide events last year.

Danville Stadium also will again have a hot air balloon fly over, likely the weekend before the event.