

# Young artists' creativity takes flight for Balloons Over Vermilion

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DANVILLE — Maggie Nardoni was thinking about a special homework assignment — naming and designing her own hot-air balloon — at home when her guinea pig, Sugar Plum, started squealing.

The Northeast Elementary Magnet School third-grader put down her pet and started sketching.

"When I showed it to her, she started purring," the 9-year-old said of her balloon design, featuring a furry brown guinea pig with black ears on a purple-and-white striped background.

Nardoni and her classmates took a break from PARCC testing on Tuesday afternoon to work on their hot-air balloon designs, which they started the day before.

Once they're finished, Jeff Summers of Media One Visual Arts will combine their creations into a poster that will be used to promote the second annual Balloons Over Vermilion Festival.

The festival will return to the Vermilion Regional Airport on July 14 and 15, bringing with it more than 30 hot-air balloons and more food vendors and family-friendly activities.

Image Gallery:

Northeast Elementary's Balloons Over Vermilion 2017 designs



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Northeast Elementary Magnet School third-graders took a break from PARCC testing Tuesday afternoon, April 11, 2017, to work on their hot-air balloon designs, which they started the day before. Once they're finished, Jeff Summers of Media One Visual Arts will combine their creations into a poster that will be used to promote the 2nd Annual Balloons Over Vermilion Festival, set for July 14-15 at the Vermilion Regional Airport.



"Your balloons are amazing," event co-chairman Pat O'Shaughnessy told the kids, who are serving as the event's student ambassadors this year.

"We were here on Friday to give them their assignment," he said, also referring to marketing director Cassie Keister. "They were asked to imagine they were hot-air balloon pilots, and they had to design their own balloon and name it. They looked at pictures of balloons. We talked about different designs, and we encouraged them to do their own research over the weekend. Then on Monday, we gave them some Sharpies and let them have at it. I'm no artist, but I think they turned out great."

Vincent Staub designed his balloon to look like a wooden paddle ball after noticing it was similar in shape to a balloon and basket. He designed the red ball to be a miniature red balloon.

"If you have a pet, they can ride in it," he explained.

Torrell Miles' inspiration came when he was in his kitchen.

"I thought of food, and my favorite food is pizza," said the 9-year-old, who decorated his balloon with 16 slices of cheese, pepperoni, sausage and green pepper pizza with a tomato-sauce red background.

Brooklyn Warfield's balloon, Unique Unicorn, features a snow-white unicorn with a rainbow-colored mane and pink-striped alicorn and fluffy, pink clouds.

"It's my favorite mystic animal," said Brooklyn, who drew it freehand. "I pictured it in my head, then I drew it with a pencil, then I colored it and outlined it in black marker."

Teacher Jessica Alyea said her students didn't mind the extra homework.

In fact, "you can tell they put a lot of effort into it," she said, pointing out that no two designs are the same. "I see a lot of happiness and the things they enjoy in their designs."

They're a really great group of kids ... and they are enjoying this opportunity."

O'Shaughnessy said people should see the ambassadors' artwork up in a month or so.

"It's only about three months away," he said of the event, which will feature tethered balloon rides, community flights, night-time balloon glows, rides on a Bell 47 helicopter, performances by the Jesse White Tumbling Team, live music and a Kids Zone.

“I can't wait,” Dakota Davis said, as she colored her Pattern Balloon. “I'm looking forward to kids playing in the Kids Zone and getting to ride in hot air balloon and just having lots of fun.”