

Airport hires balloonmeister for event

*Position will oversee
Balloons Over Mt. Vernon
in October*

BY EMILY ROTH

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MT. VERNON — During Tuesday night's meeting of the Mt. Vernon Airport Authority Board of Commissioners, the board decided to hire a balloonmeister for the upcoming Balloons Over Mt. Vernon Event.

Airport Director Chris Collins and event organizers and balloonists Kevin and Jennifer Witzel recommended the use of a balloonmeister after undergoing research for the event. The balloonmeister coordinates all flight activities during the event, including decid-



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BALLOON TALK — Commissioner Eddie Lee looks to Balloons Over Mt. Vernon organizer Jennifer Witzel during Tuesday night's Mt. Vernon Airport Authority board meeting. Witzel, along with Airport Director Chris Collins explained the need to hire a balloonmeister for the upcoming event in October.

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ing when balloons fly and when they should be grounded because of weather, as well as coordinating insurance and administrative duties.

"Independently, the three of us have been working on FAA stuff," stated Collins. "We've taken this event from a small event to a big event with the amount of balloons going from the lake to out into the movement area which requires closing the runway and there's several events and competitions that we're going to do. Flight Standard's district office has told me that there's quite a procedure to follow and it's a pretty complicated process."

"It's not something that needs to be taken lightly and it's certainly something we could do. The first year's awful rough to try to do it so they recommended that we go with one of these balloonmeisters, which basically

oversees the entire event, works with the FAA, works with the insurance company, and does all the waivers and the NOTAMS [notices to airmen] and things like that. So while I'm being told that from the Flight Standard's district office, they're working through their balloon industry contacts and their industry contacts are telling them the same thing. What really moved this forward in their mind... was their contacts were telling them ... 'get the balloonmeister.'"

Cost for hiring balloonmeister Scott Clinton of Kentucky for the event is \$2,100. Jennifer Witzel assessed Clinton as professional, organized, and safety conscious.

"I think safety is on everybody's forefront," said Witzel, "and I think this guy is our ticket to just ensure that some things don't happen. I don't think you'll ever find a more organized dot the is and cross the ts kind of person."

Balloons Over Mt. Vernon is set for Oct. 16 through 18 at the airport.

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