



Submitted Photo

FLYING WITH SHARKY — The shark-shaped hot air balloon "Sharky" will be one of 18 balloons featured at Balloons Over Mt. Vernon this year. The 140-foot-long hot air balloon will be sponsored by the RARE Chop House.

Balloons Over Mt. Vernon and Little Egypt Fly-in join forces

Balloons Over Mt. Vernon will feature 18 hot air balloons this year

BY GREG PETERSON
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — Balloons Over Mt. Vernon will have even more hot air balloons this year, including a giant shark-shaped balloon.

Event coordinator Jennifer Witzel said that there were approximately a dozen balloons last year, but there will be 18 balloons this year.

"It's definitely an increase from last year," said Witzel.

She said that the hot air balloons will still be at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport on Oct. 16-18, but the balloons will not be around the airport pond this year.

Witzel said that, though the pond creates a scenic view of the balloons, the space around the pond is not conducive for so many hot air balloons. She said that everything will be inside the fence of the airport this year.

"It's actually going to be a nicer setting, I think," said Witzel. "The pond is great, but as far as people walking around, I think it will be more inviting."

Witzel said that Balloons over Mt. Vernon and the Little Egypt Fly-in will be combined into a fun weekend that will be full of activities for kids of all ages.

She said that the mission of Bal-

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loons Over Mt. Vernon & Fly-in is to "promote the general love and education of aviation while giving back to the community," Witzel said. "We feel that this is exactly what the weekend's activities will provide."

According to Witzel, Balloons Over Mt. Vernon is not about making a profit.

She said, "We're not here to make money. Whatever little profit may come out of it, we're going to give it away."

Witzel said that the event allows multiple community-oriented groups to come together. She mentioned the United Way, the Jefferson County YMCA, and the Rotary Club.

"We're trying to incorporate a lot of different social/civic agencies who give back to the community," said Witzel.

She said that other community volunteer groups will be incorporated throughout the weekend as well.

With the Little Egypt Fly-in, there will be military warbirds, and the American Military Heritage Foundation from Indianapolis will be bringing their PV2 Harpoon "Hot Stuff" for display. The Commemorative Air Force Dixie Wings' North American P-51 Mustang and Waco biplane be on hand for rides that can be purchased.

Balloons Over Mt. Vernon & Fly-in will kick off on Oct. 16

with the United Way Balloon Glow presented by Flo-Gas Propane. The 18 hot air balloons present will be lighting up the night sky. Gates will open at 4 p.m. and the glow will take place at 6 p.m. During the glow, United Way of South Central Illinois agencies will be spotlighted through their family-oriented activity booths.

"Sharky," a 140-foot shark-shaped hot air balloon sponsored by the RARE Chop House, will be the star of the balloons.

RARE Chop House will also be sponsoring VIP seating for the United Way Glow. Ticket holders will enjoy preferred seating for the glow in a hangar, appetizers prepared by their RARE's chefs as well as a cash bar. The tickets must be purchased in advance.

Country Financial will be sponsoring a tethered balloon all weekend. Rides will be available for a nominal fee. Rides will be available Friday evening, Saturday morning, and Saturday evening.

Saturday morning will kick off with the YMCA of Jefferson County's 5K run/walk "Run with the Balloons." Participants will be watching the hot air balloons take part in the US Bank Duck Drop.

The United Way will host a pancake breakfast with lots of exciting surprises. Aviators are encouraged to fly in for a delicious breakfast. Tickets may be purchased at the United Way of South Central office or at the door.

The St. Louis Remote Control Boats will be taking float all day on the pond Saturday.

Young Eagle rides will occur from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday. Any child ages 8 to 17 may take an exploratory flight in an airplane.

Classic cars will be welcome at the "Cruise to Balloons." The cars will gather at the Times Square Mall to be escorted at 10 a.m. to the airport, and to be displayed for the day. Prizes will be given to the top three exhibitors, as well as other surprises to be given to the classic car enthusiasts.

The Mt. Vernon Rotary will be sponsoring a ping pong ball drop at 10 a.m. Rotary members will be selling ping pong balls that offer a chance to win a hot air balloon ride.

The Tri-County Electric Aviation Education Zone will be open from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. for kids of all ages. The zone will feature balloons, flight simulators, pilots, and much more.

At 2 p.m., there will be salute to our veterans. The Hall of Honor and the Col. R.D. White Veterans Museum will be open for the public.

Saturday will conclude with Crossroads Community Hospital's Survivor Flight. Details regarding how these survivors will be chosen will be forthcoming. There will also be vendors, crafters, inflatables, and other family-friendly events on Friday and Saturday.

Sunday morning will wrap up with a fun flight from the airport. Witzel said that more information will be posted on the "Balloons Over Mt. Vernon" Facebook page.

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