

# Fall Fest features first balloon event Friday at airport

*Highly anticipated event surpasses organizers' expectations*

**BY GREG PETERSON**  
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

**MT. VERNON** — The Mt. Vernon Fall Fest balloon glow event held Friday night at Mt. Vernon Outland Airport offered a phenomenal start to the second year of Fall Fest.

Cars lined the parking lot of the airport, with those in attendance excited to see hot air balloons come back to Mt. Vernon — the last balloon event was held in 1985.

Attendance appeared to be in the hundreds, if not nearly a thousand people, but an official count was not yet available.

“Nothin’ But A Breeze” pilot Kevin Witzel said he was very excited about the attendance. He stated, “I think it’s great,” and commented that people were still coming in at 7 p.m.

“Just thrilled,” is how “Nothin’ But A Breeze” crew member Renee Sisk described her experience. She said attendance was “more than we expected.”

There were 10 balloons at the glow, and each one offered a different dazzling light show for the viewers.

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Sentinel Photo/GREG PETERSON

**BALLOON GLOW!**  
— Ten hot air balloons entertained the crowd at the Mt. Vernon Fall Fest balloon glow Friday at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport. Gordo the Monkey was a clear favorite of the crowd.

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Not only did the balloons glow at random intervals, but the announcer had the balloons perform sequenced glows that really showed off the beauty of the balloons under the moonlit sky.

With the help of children and adults in the audience, the announcer would count down from 10 and the balloonists would either all glow at the same time or flicker their glow in what was called a “tinkle burn.”

A crowd favorite was a special shape balloon, Adam Magee’s “Gordo the Monkey.”

Magee’s balloon, shaped uniquely like a monkey’s head, inspired crowds of children to chant “Gordo! Gordo! Gordo!” in enthusiastic support during the glow.

Olivia Burns said “the

monkey one,” was her favorite balloon, while her mother indicated that Pat Brouillet’s interwoven green and black balloon called “Envy” was her favorite.

Mt. Vernon Airport Manager Chris Collins also said he is pleased with the success of the event. He compared attendance to the typical turnout for the Fourth of July event at the airport.

Attendance to the event was free, but volunteers for United Way asked for donations as people entered the balloon area.

“People have been very generous,” said Mike Beard. He said donations to the United Way were “fantastic” and that they are thankful for everyone who was kind enough to donate.

The Witzels previously indicated that they hope to continue to expand the event, and given this year’s attendance, attaining that lofty goal should be nothin’ but a breeze.

[gpeterson@morningsentinel.com](mailto:gpeterson@morningsentinel.com)



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**WARMING UP** — Balloonist Kevin Witzel fires up his balloon “Nothin’ But A Breeze” while crew members hold the basket down. Even the balloon glow requires the help of a loyal crew.