



Profile photos/Mike Newman

# once a balloonist, always a balloonist

**R**EACH FOR THE SKY as 65 hot air balloons take flight over Plano in the **30th Annual EDS Plano Balloon Festival** September 18–20. Oak Point Park will once again be the launching pad for Plano’s most anticipated event.

“Because the Plano Balloon Festival has been around for so long, everyone comes here knowing they’re going to have a good time,” said **Kevin Thompson**, who has flown in the festival every year since it began in 1980. “When we first started the festival, getting the financial backing was difficult. But now, people in the community can hardly wait. They expect it every year and are really proud that the festival is in Plano.”

Because community involvement has increased over the years, the Plano Balloon Festival is the largest, longest running balloon festival in North Texas. People travel from all over to participate.

“That’s what I’m looking forward to,” said Kevin. “We see balloonists from other parts of Texas that we don’t see very often, and you build friendships. That’s the sport of aviation.”



## Kevin Thompson will take his 30th flight in the EDS Credit Union Plano Balloon Festival

You also build trust with your crew. Who keeps Kevin afloat? Friends and family members, and he said working with them is never dull.

“Ballooning is fun because it’s not a single sport. You need people to help you...to get the balloon up, to drive the chase vehicle, to do the recovery. It’s an activity for a lot of people to have fun with, and when you land, people drive up and are fascinated, especially kids.”

Kevin is a UPS driver, and perhaps being on the road so often ignites his sky-flying passion. He has been flying since 1975 when his lifelong friend, **Rocky Bailey**, taught him. “He’s a retired airline pilot and got me flying right out of high school.

“The first balloon my wife and I had, Rocky designed back in 1984 and brought it to the Plano Balloon Festival. We loved the design, so we

# PLANO BALLOON FESTIVAL SEPT. 18-20

bought it and it lasted until 2003. Then, we had a new one made that is identical.”

How much does a hot air balloon cost? “Prices vary depending on the size, shape and design,” said Kevin. “Balloons can be from \$15,000 and up. You could probably get a used one in good shape for less.”

Kevin owns a 90,000-cubic-foot hot air balloon, which fits three people comfortably in the basket. Friends of his who live in Plano have a son who works in the commercial ride business



and flies a balloon that is 240,000 cubic feet, which carries 8–10 people.

“So size and design is what makes the costs go up,” Kevin continues. “You also

have to buy insurance. A hot air balloon is a flight-certified FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) aircraft. It has to have an annual inspection. And I have to take a flight test for a pilot’s license that carries the rating of

‘Lighter-than-Air Free Balloon.’ Plus, you’ll burn 15–20 gallons of propane... so, ballooning is not a terribly expensive hobby, but it’s not a free hobby either.”

When Kevin’s not flying the skies, he’s shooting golf or spending time with his two grandchildren. But you can be sure his Lone Star hot air balloon will be soaring high at this year’s festival. “Plano is a fun place to fly; we have very few red areas, where the landowner doesn’t want us landing, so it’s very balloon-friendly.”

## History in the making

**Marquita Thompson** (no relation to Kevin) co-chaired the first Plano Balloon Rally with **Jim Marshall**. “He got 50 pilots on board, and I did the fundraising,” she said. “It wasn’t easy to raise over \$40,000—a lot of money in 1980—for a project few people had ever heard of.”

Finally, after many months of planning and recruiting volunteers, October 17, 1980 arrived. Marquita recalls, “I awoke to a terrible thunderstorm. Rain, thunder, lightning, and high winds were *not* on the agenda. But by afternoon, the sun prevailed, and out of five scheduled balloon launches for the weekend, the first four were highly successful.”

She continued, “The mass ascension of 50 hot air balloons at the Willow Bend Polo Club grounds stopped traffic all along Park Boulevard.

It was a fantastic first for Plano history in the making.”

Marquita attributes Plano resident and pilot **Randy Wright** as the “mastermind” behind the event. Randy was the president of the Plano Chamber of Commerce then, and wanted Plano to have a balloon rally like the International Balloon Fiesta in Albuquerque, the largest hot air balloon festival in the world.

“He thought this could be a really good thing for Plano,” said Marquita. “And the tradition continues. My heartiest congratulations to **Jo Via** and **Jessica Jackson** (current festival directors) for continuing to produce Plano’s No. 1 entertainment attraction. It is still a thrill!”

— **BRIT MOTT**



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## PLANO BALLOON FESTIVAL SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

### FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

- 4 p.m.** ▶ Festival Opens, Bus Service Begins  
**5:30 p.m.** ▶ RE/MAX Parachute Team Exhibition  
**6 p.m.** ▶ Balloon Launch by RE/MAX  
**7 p.m.** ▶ Elliott's Hardware presents the Killdares in Concert on the Main Stage  
**8 p.m.** ▶ Balloon Glow  
**8:45 p.m.** ▶ Family fun Street Dance with the Killdares

### SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19

- 6 a.m.** ▶ Gates/Parking Lots Open, Bus Service Begins  
**6:30 a.m.** ▶ Dawn Patrol "Wake up Plano"  
**7 a.m.** ▶ Balloon Launch by the City of Plano  
**5 p.m.** ▶ RE/MAX Parachute Team Exhibition  
**6 p.m.** ▶ Balloon Launch by EDS Credit Union  
**7 p.m.** ▶ Good Question Band in concert on the Main Stage  
**8 p.m.** ▶ Balloon Glow by The Take A Load Off, Texas program provided by Oncor  
**9 p.m.** ▶ Spectacular Fireworks Show

### SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20

- 6 a.m.** ▶ Gates/Parking Lots Open, Bus Service Begins  
**6:30 a.m.** ▶ Dawn Patrol "Wake up Plano"  
**7 a.m.** ▶ Balloon Launch  
**5 p.m.** ▶ RE/MAX Parachute Team Exhibition  
**6 p.m.** ▶ Balloon Launch  
**7 p.m.** ▶ Festival Closes

### PARKING AND PRICES

Oak Point Park is located at 2801 E. Spring Creek Pkwy. Prime Parking at Collin College and First United Methodist Church is \$10 and off-site parking at the Plano Centre is \$5. Ride the DART rail to the Parker Road Station and hop on the free "balloon flyer." Buses run from 6 a.m.–10 p.m. *Spring Creek Parkway between Jupiter and Parker roads will be closed to traffic. Towing will be forced in No Parking areas.*

Admission is \$8 for a **Day Ticket** (allows readmission during the day); \$5 for a **Single Admission Event Ticket**; and \$4 for a **Special Discount Ticket** between 9 a.m.–3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Admission is free for kids under 36". Seniors 65 & older receive \$1 off any ticket price. For more information, call 972.867.7566 or visit [planoballoonfest.org](http://planoballoonfest.org).

**NOTE TO PARENTS:** There will be a changing and feeding station for babies at the Children's Medical Center **Baby Breakroom**.

## Plano International Festival

You don't have to pack your bags and travel far to experience international cuisine, music and art. The **Plano International Festival** returns to Haggard Park Saturday, October 10 showcasing Plano's rich tapestry of cultures.

Also part of the festivities will be cultural displays, a Parade of Nations, and a naturalization ceremony.

Last year, 75 new citizens were sworn in during the ceremony. Also last year, the festival showcased its first International Art Exhibit. "We are very excited to have our International Art Exhibit again this year," said

festival president Graciela Katzer. "And we're adding another new feature—international games and sports in the children's area."

The festival will once again be a "green" event. In 2008, organizers diverted more than 50 percent of waste from landfills through a comprehensive zero-waste program. Attendees will again be asked to sort their trash to aid in this effort. For more information on this family-friendly event, visit [planointernationalfestival.org](http://planointernationalfestival.org). Admission and parking are free.



*A Parade of Nations representing many countries around the world will kick off the Plano International Festival come October. Profile photo/Mike Newman*

## Cupcakes and Cowboys score big for Salvation Army

To celebrate the Dallas Cowboys' 2009 season, **Sprinkles Cupcakes** is dishing out a cream-cheese-frosted Blue Velvet cupcake with a candied blue star September 12–19. Proceeds will be donated to **The Salvation Army**.

During the promotion, every day one Blue Velvet cupcake will have a silver star hidden inside. Recipients of these cupcakes will win a tour of the Cowboys Stadium and a cap and T-shirt. They will also be entered in a drawing to win four tickets to the Thanksgiving Day game on November 25, a tour of the stadium for four guests, four Cowboys jerseys, and a football autographed by Cowboys Owner and General Manager Jerry Jones and Head Coach Wade Phillips.

**Charlotte Jones Anderson**, President of Charities for the Dallas Cowboys, said, "We know loyal Cowboys fans will get behind this initiative to help their fellow citizens through Sprinkles and The Salvation Army in a sweet way."

