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MIDFIRST OHIO CHALLENGE HOT AIR BALLOON FESTIVAL

Corporate balloons inflate event's numbers

By [Jessica Heffner](#)
Staff Writer

Wednesday, July 16, 2008

MIDDLETOWN — More corporate balloons will fill the skies during the MidFirst Ohio Challenge Hot Air Balloon Festival, pushing the participant total up from 30 to 37 this year.

A total of nine corporate-sponsored balloons will be displayed during the three-day event — the most ever to fly, said Ann Mort, publicity chairwoman.

"Apparently, the corporate sponsors are seeing this is as a nice way to get their name out in front of the public," she said.

In general, balloon companies are either contacted by a business to create a "flying billboard" or the pilots solicit them to consider the option, said Michael Gliatti, owner of Bella Balloons Air Balloon Co. in Lebanon.

Companies market the balloon as a better alternative than a billboard, which can cost \$6,000 to \$10,000 per month "and people remember less than balloons they saw," he said.

However, balloons are an expensive endeavor, costing \$2,000 to \$6,000 a month with contracts spanning from two to five years — the typical life of the balloon, he said.

"Really, to make it cost-effective for the manufacturing cost of the balloon, you have to be willing to use it for several years," he said. "It is a long-term engagement."

And the balloons are flown at both high-traffic areas for advertising purposes and passenger rides, "giving them a lot of different exposure," he said.

Gliatti is flying his first corporate balloon this weekend — the SanMarGale I.

Pilot Brian Trapp is an old hand at corporate balloons, with his company, Gentle Breeze, landing a Pizza Hut sponsorship in 1984.

This year, his company will fly five corporate balloons — three for ReMax, one for Kettering Medical Center and one for Houser Asphalt.

"A lot of our corporate balloons are word-of-mouth," he said. "People see what we do and contact us."

Typically, if a balloon is still air-worthy after a contract expires, pilots can remove the stitched-on logo to use the balloon for passenger rides or sell it to a hobbyist, Gliatti said.

"You have to remove the stitches or panels by hand," he said. "It's not fun but if someone may want to purchase a balloon, it's worthwhile."

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