

# Don Kersten

Born May 10, 1925 – Died February 7, 1998

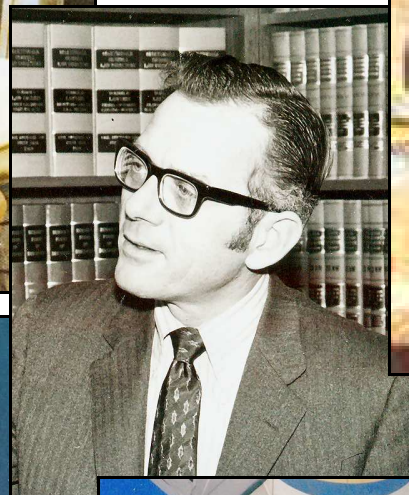
## UNITED STATES BALLOONING HALL OF FAME

Balloon Federation of America

National Balloon Museum, Indianola, Iowa

INDUCTED INTO THE HALL OF FAME JULY 31, 2005

One of the founding fathers of the Balloon Federation of America.



25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Flight 1990



Parachutist 1965

Kersten's Balloon, Merope

# DON KERSTEN

Fort Dodge, Iowa  
1925 – 1998

- Born and raised in Fort Dodge, Iowa, Don was the son of E. M. Kersten and Anne Kersten. He was married to Merope Mitchell who preceded him in death 9th 1984. They had four children: Anne Curley, Steve Kersten, Mary Kersten Crandall and Margie Kersten Green. Don married Bonnie Wievel in 1987.
- Educated in Fort Dodge, Iowa grades 1-12, BA degree from the University of Notre Dame and a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree from Drake University.
- Don Kersten was one of the originals in the sport of ballooning in the early days of the modern hot air balloon invented by Ed Yost in 1960. His name found right alongside those of Yost, Piccard, Pellegrino, Sonnichsen, Barnes and others.
- It was in 1965 when Kersten, already a near 20-year aviation veteran who had flown fixed wing, gliders and done some parachuting as well as sky-diving, first discovered ballooning. "I'd never seen one (balloon) but I read about this fellow [Don] Piccard who had built one. I called him up and I said, 'OK, I'll buy it if you come to town and teach me to fly and get me a license.'" In July of 1965 Piccard went to Fort Dodge, Iowa "and after the third flight he got out and said 'OK-you've got a commercial license. Kersten competed in the U. S. National Championship in Reno, Nevada in September and where he took third place. In the late 1960's Kersten was one of about a dozen active hot air balloonists in the U.S.
- Past president (2 times) and a founding father of the Balloon Federation of America. Don served first as vice president and then as president of the Balloon Federation of America from 1967 to 1971. The BFA had been organized as a gas balloon federation but Don Kersten, Ed Yost and Peter Pellegrino proposed to the National Aeronautic Association a new constitution which change the BFA into a hot air ballooning federation. B.F.A. prospered under his leadership and attracted membership totaling 127 by the end of his first term as President, an increase of 747% in four years. He served on the board of directors of the BFA again served as president 1975 to 1977 and in that capacity was one of the key leaders for establishing the National Balloon Museum in Indianola, Iowa.
- Don entered his majestic balloon, "Merope" in the official National Championships, held in Reno in 1965 and 1966. It was largely through the efforts of Don, together with Ed Yost and community leaders in Indianola, Iowa that another U. S. National Championship was organized in 1970. Seventeen balloons were assembled under the sponsor-ship of the Iowa State Fair to choose the fifth National Champion. The preliminaries were held in Indianola and the final event was at the Iowa State Fair. This gathering not only proved to be a financial success, but exposed aeronauts to the idyllic community of Indianola, Iowa, which beginning in 1971, become the home of the U.S. National Hot Air Balloon Championships for 18 years.
- Don's organizational and diplomatic talents extend further, into the realization of the First World Championship Balloon Races, held in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In 1971, he secured approval from the C.I.A. for United States sponsorship of the event and helped solicit adequate financial sponsorship to produce the First World Championship for Hot-Air Balloons in February of 1973. He also served as an International Judge at the 1975 World Championships in Albuquerque and as Chairman of the International Jury for the World Championships in York. As further service to the advancement of ballooning, Don has represented the U.S. on the World Ballooning Committee (C.I.A.) at Paris in 1970, in Oosterwick, Holland in 1971 and Paris again in 1972, 1976 and 1977.
- In addition to flying in every National Championship from 1965 through 1977, Don has participated in meets of the St. Paul, Minnesota Winter Carnival, the Columbus, Ohio International Races and Albuquerque Fiestas. He participated with some notoriety in all years of the Indianapolis
- Speedway Balloon Race, placing first in 1968. He has traveled extensively to attend various non-competitive rallies, including California's inimitable WHAMOBASS balloon rally.
- Don founded the All Iowa Rally, held since 1975 in Fort Dodge, Iowa.
- Don's aviation accomplishments extend beyond hot-air ballooning, having served in the U.S. Air Force from 1948 to 1952. He holds F.A.A. private certificates in single and multi-engine land and gliders, plus an unlimited commercial license for free balloons. He is an experienced, certificated skydiver and member of the Quiet Birdmen. He has flown in gas balloons as the U.S. representative in the Sint Niklaas, Belgium Balloon Race (1970); in Tilburg, Holland Gas Balloon Event (1971); during the Swiss High Alpine Balloon Week (1972) and in Arhem, Holland (1976).
- Apart from his ballooning exploits, Don served as the senior member of Kersten, Opheim, Carlson & Estes, a prominent law firm from Fort Dodge, Iowa. His legal experience and volunteer time has supported the B.F.A. through past litigation and he has personally contributed opinions and advice relevant to important Federal and State statutes affecting balloon operations.
- In consideration of his central role in the reorganization of the B.F.A. and over 11 years service to ballooning at large, the Balloon Federation of America proudly nominated Don N. Kersten for the 1977 Montgolfier Diploma in the category of Service and Contribution to the Development of Sport Ballooning.
- In 1966 he accidentally knocked over an outhouse with his balloon in Indianapolis, Indiana. It was occupied by 2 women at the time. Due to injuries suffered by the women he was sued. The event earned him wide notoriety and started a special "Don's Outhouse" event at the Nationals which has been continued in the National Balloon Classic as the "Don Kersten Memorial Outhouse Race".
- Don was widely known for his active participation and support of the sport of ballooning 1965-2001
- Kersten remained a sport pilot all these years, but never ventured into a commercial ballooning enterprise. Indeed he is quite proud of the fact that he "never charged anybody a nickel" for a balloon ride.