

2
0
2
4



U. S. BALLOONING HALL OF FAME INDUCTION CEREMONY



Joe Heartsill: A Skybound Pioneer in Competitive Hot Air Ballooning.

Joe Heartsill's life is a testament to the unexpected turns that passion can take. Born in the quaint town of Walnut Springs, Texas, Joe's journey into the mesmerizing world of hot air ballooning commenced in October 1979, an encounter that would propel him from being a high school football coach to a celebrated figure in competitive ballooning. The serendipitous beginning of Joe's ballooning adventures unfolded during a road trip with his wife, Nancy, en route to Colorado. Passing through Albuquerque, New Mexico, the Heartsills were captivated by the spectacle of colorful balloons gracefully gliding along the Rio Grande. Intrigued by this airborne ballet, they decided to extend their stay in Albuquerque, eager to delve deeper into the world of hot air ballooning.

It took less than forty-eight hours for Joe's fascination to transform into a life-altering decision. Despite Nancy's concern and lacking any prior knowledge of flying balloons, he quickly found himself the proud owner of his first hot air balloon. With the balloon and trailer in tow, Joe headed back home to Texas, where he swiftly discovered the significance of understanding wind conditions for navigating the skies in a balloon.

Enter Steve Jones, a seasoned pilot, and more importantly, a newfound friend. Steve assumed the role of Joe's instructor, guiding him through the nuances of hot air ballooning. Over the next several years, Joe embraced the joy of being a fiesta pilot, participating in hot air balloon events purely for the enjoyment and his love of flying.

In July 1986, a pivotal moment arrived in Joe's ballooning odyssey when he attended the Great Texas Balloon Race in Longview, Texas. The atmosphere was charged with the promise of competition, and Joe, drawn by the allure of challenging the skies, realized that his future lay in competitive hot air ballooning.

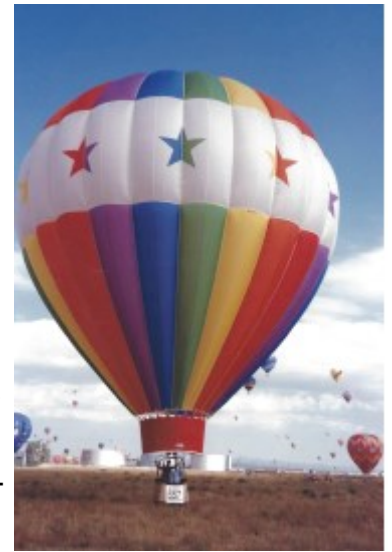


1st Balloon

The year 1987 marked a significant milestone for Joe as he claimed the title of Rookie of the Year at the U.S. Nationals in Indianola, Iowa. It was a testament to his dedication and rapid progression within the competitive ballooning circuit. The following year, in 1988, Joe's ascendancy continued as he clinched the champion title at Battle Creek International, solidifying his status as a force to be reckoned with in the world of competitive hot air ballooning.

The competitive side of hot air ballooning had become more than a pursuit for Joe; it had transformed into a burning passion. His competitive nature, honed during his days as a six-man high school football coach, found a new and exhilarating outlet in the vast skies above. The camaraderie formed with fellow enthusiasts, the thrill of the competition, and the sheer joy of navigating the skies in a hot air balloon became integral parts of Joe's identity.

Joe's ballooning journey grew even sweeter as it evolved into a family affair, becoming a shared adventure that spanned not only domestic events, but across international horizons. Together with his wife and crew chief, Nancy, their two sons, Lucas and Rhett, and daughter, Kate, the Heartsill family became a fixture at balloon events, creating lasting memories as they crisscrossed the globe in pursuit of their shared passion.



2nd Balloon



1995 World Championship crew

The familial bond extended beyond mere spectators. Joe took it upon himself to pass on his expertise to the next generation, becoming a mentor to his two sons, Lucas and Rhett. As he had once learned from Steve Jones, Joe now imparted his knowledge, skills, and love for the sport to his sons, ensuring that the family legacy soared not only in the skies but also through the generations.

And there's more to the Heartsill ballooning legacy—Joe and Nancy's five granddaughters are integral members of the ballooning family. As part of Joe's dedicated crew, they travel together, adding another layer to the shared adventure that is ballooning. The skies are not just a stage for competition; they are a canvas where generations of Heartsills come together, united by the thrill of being lighter than air.

Beyond the competitions and accolades, Joe Heartsill's story is one of resilience, curiosity, and the unwavering pursuit of passion. From a chance encounter in Albuquerque, to standing atop podiums at international events, Joe's journey exemplifies the transformative power of following one's heart. His legacy in the world of hot air ballooning is not just etched in trophies woven into the fabric of a family bound by the magic of flight.



1st Competitive Balloon



Girl Crew





Orange Vest Wind Team



Texas Racers



The Heartsills



1st 1992 US National Championship



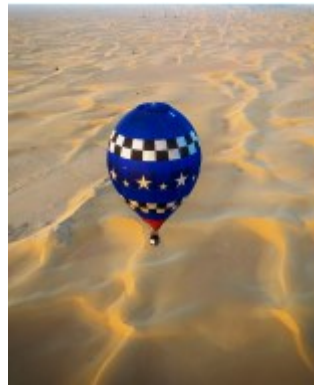
Rhett, Kate, Lucas



1987 Rookie of the Year



2015 - World Air Games



Dubai UAE



2014 - Tochigi, Japan



2022 US Nationals
Joe, Nancy, Rhett, Lucas



Sid Cutter Memorial 2023
"The Boat"

U.S. National Championships:

1992 U.S. Nationals - Middletown, Ohio
1997 U.S. Nationals - Columbia, Missouri
1999 U.S. Nationals - Rantoul, Illinois
2007 U.S. Nationals - Anderson, South Carolina
2008 U.S. Nationals - Waco, Texas

1997 U.S. Team Champion – Battle Creek, Michigan

Notable World Championships:

1995 World Champion – Battle Creek, Michigan
1993 World Championship, 3rd Place – Luxembourg
1997 World Championship, 3rd Place – Saga, Japan
2006 World Championship, 2nd Place – Motegi, Japan

Honda World Grand Prix 1998-2006 – Motegi, Japan

1st Place - 1998 1st Place - 1999 1st Place - 2002
1st Place - 2004 1st Place - 2005 1st Place - 2006

Joe competed on the winning team in 6 of 9 Honda World Grand Prix Championships

“Motegi is the most challenging flying area for hot air balloons in the world.”

World Air Games – Mondovi, Italy – 3rd Place

2014 - Tochigi International Champion

Joe was off to a slow start but after scoring an average of 993 points on the last six tasks, he was able to capture a 1st place finish. “My favorite and most rewarding championship”

Most Memorable Flight - Flying over spectacular Niagara Falls

Additional Acknowledgements

- Trained/Mentored sons that also achieved Rookie of the Year. Lucas (1998), Rhett (2010)
- 2016 – Joe was a key teammate in Rhett winning his 1st U.S. National Championship and 1st World Championship
- 2016 – First Father/Son World Championship (Joe/Rhett)
- 2019 – First U.S. Nationals Father/Son 1st Place/2nd Place finish (Joe/Rhett)
- 2021 – First time Joe/Lucas/Rhett compete together in U.S. Nationals
- 2022 – Second time U.S. Nationals Father/Son 1st Place/2nd Place finish (Joe/Rhett)
- 2024 – Qualified for 2024 World Championship in Hungary

Joe has qualified for 15 of the last 17 World Championships

To my good fortune, my wife, Nancy Heartsill, is the “best crew chief in the world.” - Joe Heartsill

Throughout the years, ballooning has been a family affair for the Heartsills. Joe and Nancy’s three children (Lucas, Kate & Rhett) learned the sport from the “ground up” starting as the ground crew for Joe from very young ages. As a Pilot, nothing has been more critical than having a good Crew Chief. For decades, Nancy has guided Joe through the ups and downs of the competitive environment, becoming one of the best Pilot/ Crew Chief combinations to date.

As one of the Greats once said “Nancy is the best Crew Chief in the World” – David Levin (HOF)



**Nancy
World's Best Crew Chief**



Japan



**Joe, Nancy
Flight Planning**



**Nancy, Kate
World's Best Crew Chiefs**



Nancy's Girl Crew



1995 World Championship



1993 Luxembourg

Crew Chief of the Century

While the sport of hot-air ballooning may have changed considerably over the years, there is one person that has been a constant presence on balloon fields all over the world. This person has transitioned through everything from paper maps to iPads, and observers to loggers. This week marks her 40th anniversary as a committed Crew Chief to not only her husband, but also her sons. On top of that - she has been a constant pillar of support to countless other pilots and teams across the globe. This person is Nancy Heartsill, and today we would like to recognize her for her dedication to the sport of hot air ballooning. She is not just our Crew Chief of the Year, she is our Crew Chief of 40 years.

Nancy's ballooning career all started in October of 1979 on a road trip from Texas to Colorado with her husband, Joe. After a long day on the road they decided to spend the night in Albuquerque, New Mexico. They woke up early to get a head start on the drive, and it just so happened to be the week of Fiesta, so balloons were on the horizon. Curiosity led to a detour that changed their lives forever. It was spontaneous and impulsive, but serendipitous, nonetheless. Joe was fascinated, Nancy was skeptical. They never made it to Colorado, but they eventually made it home to Texas with a hot-air balloon, a trailer and possibly an empty bank account.

As their adventure began, Nancy experienced some of the pioneer days of competition ballooning. Long before the days of a moving map and GPS she navigated and drove to targets with a paper map on her steering wheel and three unruly children in the backseat. She kept one eye on the kids and one eye on the pibals in the sky. To help keep them safe at busy intersections, she dressed them in orange safety vests and lined them up in the crosshairs of her compass, forming a wind-line that allowed Joe to make his approach to the target as if he was flying down a runway. She also helped streamline the task of packing up the balloon, by designing what some pilots call "Velcro straps" used to tighten and squeeze the air out of the envelope. Nancy juggled a radio, a compass, a spotlight and even a flare gun at times. She has walked many many miles with observers dragging measuring tapes, spray paint and those awful "hip chains" before the days of logger scoring. She has driven many miles and studied many intersections making a personal target list before there was a predetermined goal list. She's been on baggie hunts through every environment imaginable, from forests to swamps, corn fields to kudzu, deserts, rainforests all the way to rice fields. She's seen one too many porta-potties and had one too many complimentary buffets. She's done it all and she's done it all with a smile on her face. (No matter what the scores are). Many will agree that Nancy has always greeted every pilot, crew person, observer, official and volunteer with a friendly face. For years, she has been a team player and a cheerleader for all.

Nancy Heartsill is a role model for the sport, and everyone involved. She has relentlessly and selflessly supported her family, and the ballooning community as a whole. She has been an integral part of the achievements made by her husband and her sons. Many trophies have been awarded to the Heartsill pilots, including multiple National and World Championship trophies; however, the true gold medal should go to Nancy, for heart of gold.

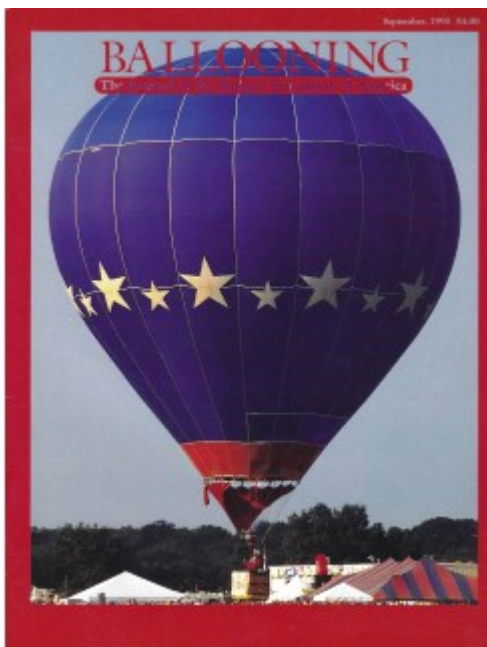
By: Kate Heartsill 7



Texas Racer



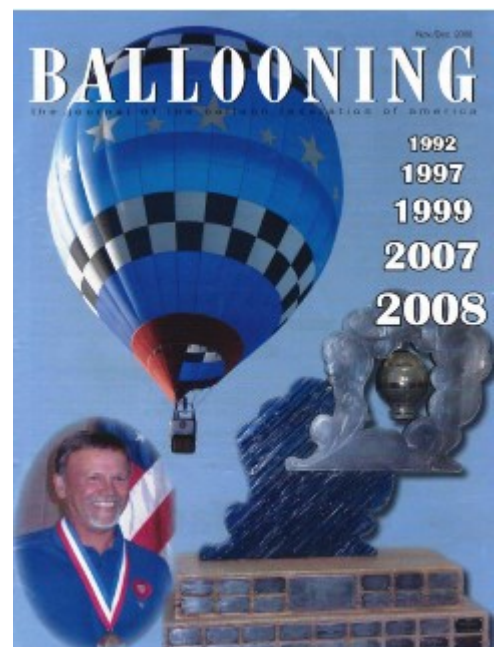
2022- Page, AZ.



1995- World Championship



Joe and Nancy
Watching the Boys



US Championships



Kate- Cheers to Ballooning



Balloonist's Prayer

The Winds have Welcomed you with softness.

The Sun has blessed you with his warm hands.

You have flown so high and so well, that God has joined you in your laughter.

And He has set you gently back again into the loving arms of Mother Earth.