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U. S. BALLOONING HALL OF FAME INDUCTION CEREMONY



Rob Bartholomew: A Legacy of Excellence in Aviation and Ballooning

Few individuals have left as profound a mark on the world of ballooning and aviation as Rob Bartholomew. With a career spanning over five decades, Rob has not only soared to great heights—both literally and figuratively—but has also shaped the sport through leadership, mentorship, and an unwavering dedication to excellence.

From earning his hot air balloon license in 1974 to competing on the world stage and serving as a guiding force in aviation safety and education, Rob's journey is a testament to passion, perseverance, and pioneering spirit. Today, we celebrate his extraordinary contributions and welcome him into the Hall of Fame, honoring a lifetime dedicated to the skies.

In 1972, at the age of 27, Rob Bartholomew was hard at work farming his 3,000-acre operation when a group of hot air balloons unexpectedly landed in his field. Having never seen a balloon before, he was completely mesmerized. In that moment, he knew he would fly one someday.

Farming was a full-time commitment that left little room for hobbies, but fate intervened when Rob broke his ankle. The injury forced him to slow down, giving him the time to explore the fascinating world of ballooning. In January 1974, while still in a full-leg cast, he took his first flight with Phil Gray. By May of that year, his first balloon, **"The Streak,"** had arrived.



CHARLIE BROWN

Becoming a balloon pilot in those days was a different process than it is today. At the time, there was only one type of license—a commercial license. To earn it, a pilot had to pass a written test, complete flight instruction, and pass a check ride. Rob logged four training flights, totaling seven hours of instruction with Phil Gray, completed one solo flight, and passed his check ride with Tom Oerman. With that, he was officially a balloonist. While some of his friends and family were excited about his new passion, his father thought he was “off his rocker.”

Over the years, advancements in balloon technology have greatly improved the sport. Equipment upgrades—such as more efficient burners and **Tracy Barnes’ invention of the parachute top**—have revolutionized ballooning.

Rob’s journey as a dealer for Barnes Balloons began after he took his first ride in one in 1976. He appreciated how easily they could be assembled, and his wife, Linda, a skilled repair specialist, found them easy to sew and maintain. From that point on, Barnes became their brand of choice.

In 1978, **Balloons Over Iowa Balloon Ltd** was born. Since then, Rob has become an **FAA Designated Examiner**, conducting **612 check flights**. Linda serves as **Chief Inspector**, having completed **3,313 annual inspections** and repairs on **1,601 balloons**. With over **2,000 flight hours**, most of Rob’s time in the air has been dedicated to check flights, helping new pilots earn their wings.

Rob and four fellow balloonists also co-founded **Balloons Over Iowa**, a club unlike any other—one without bylaws, where budgets are measured in kegs instead of dollars, and where the club president has always been a dog. **Cleo, a balloon-loving basset hound**, was the first president, followed by several more hard-working canine successors. Despite its unconventional structure, Balloons Over Iowa has become one of the strongest and most successful ballooning organizations in the country. The club actively supports both the **National Balloon Museum** and the **National Balloon Classic** in Indianola, Iowa.

Additionally, the club runs one of the top **FAA-approved ground schools in the nation**, drawing an average of **40 students** per session. While many states have seen a decline in balloon pilots, Iowa has experienced steady growth in



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HOGS ARE BEAUTIFUL

numbers. Rob attributes this to the state's long history as the home of the **U.S. Hot Air Balloon Championships** for 18 years and the continued success of the **National Balloon Classic**, which provides opportunities for balloonists to fly both morning and evening. Many second and third generation pilots have emerged from these events, ensuring the sport's legacy continues.

Some of Rob's flight experiences have been thrilling—especially the one over Lake Michigan. I can only imagine the mix of excitement and panic when the fog rolled in just after take off. Linda and the crew were searching all day, only to find him at the hotel bar? Classic! He might still be making up for that one.

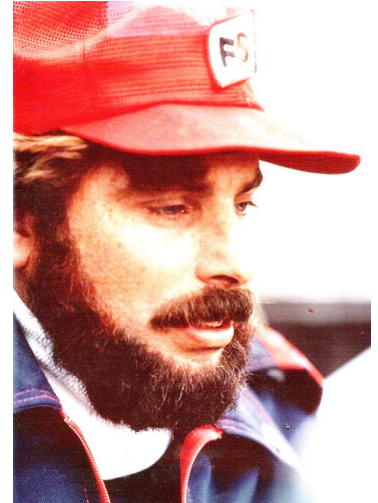
Among Rob's most cherished memories is winning the **U.S. National Hot Air Balloon Championship in Indianola**, making him the only Iowan to achieve this feat. His victory earned him a place at the **World Hot Air Balloon Championship in Saga, Japan, in 1989**. Beyond the competition, Rob fondly remembers the kindness and generosity of the Japanese people. One local resident even filmed their entire flight, and, to Rob and Linda's surprise, gifted them the footage—a treasured keepsake from an unforgettable experience.



ROB AND LINDA, A MATCH MADE IN BALLOONING!



ROB WAS FLYING GOVERNOR RAY



THE FLYING FARMER

Aviation & Certification Achievements:

- Obtained his **fixed-wing pilot license** in 1966.
- Earned his **Commercial Lighter than Air Free Balloon License** in 1974.
- Became a **Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Designated Examiner** in 1978.
- Founded and operates a **FAA Certified Repair Station** since 1978.
- Served as a **FAA Prevention Counselor**.
- Became a **FAA Certified 141 Flight School Chief Instructor** in 1986.

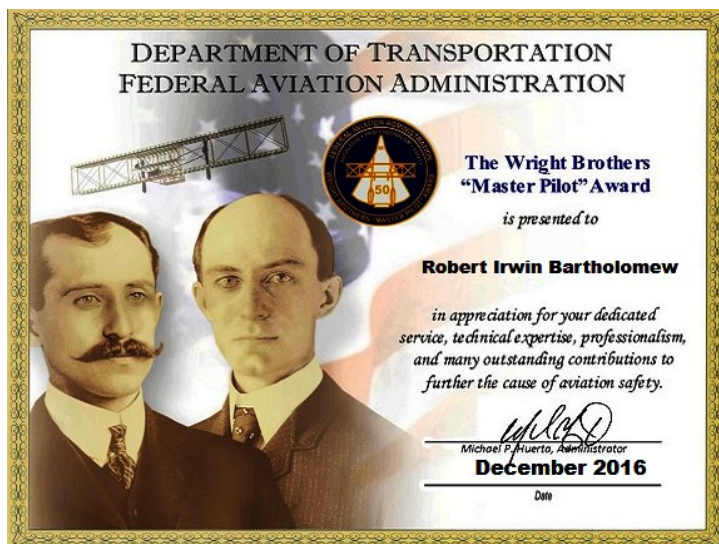


Leadership & Organizational Contributions:

- Member of the **Balloon Federation of America (BFA)** since 1974.
- Served on the **BFA Board of Directors for the North Central Region** (Secretary 1985-1986, Board Member 1986-1988).
- **Founding father & current board member of Balloons Over Iowa** (since 1979).

Awards & Honors:

- Received the **Iowa Balloonist Association's "Distinguished Aeronaut" Award** in 1982.
- Earned the **Balloon Federation of America Ed Yost Master Pilot Award** in 2014 for 40 years of incident-free flying.
- Honored with the **FAA Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award** in 2016 for 50 years of incident-free flying.



Competitive Ballooning Achievements:

U.S. Nationals:

- 1st place: 1988
- 2nd place: 1987
- 4th place: 1984
- 7th place: 1977, 1982, 1983, 1986
- 9th place: 1979
- 12th place: 1974

Other notable finishes:

- Multiple top-15 placements



THE ONLY IOWA PILOT TO WIN THE US
NATIONALS IN INDIANOLA, IOWA 1988

International & Regional Competitions:

- **Qualified for the World Championships (France): 1983**
- **Competed in the World Championship (Saga, Japan): 1989 (qualified in 1988)**
- **14th place in the World Championship: 1985**

Competed in the North American Championship: 1985, 1988

Other Major Ballooning Titles:

- **BFA National Point Leader: 1978, 1984, 1985**

All Iowa Championships:

- **1st place: 1983, 1991, 2002, 2003**

National Balloon Classic:

- **1992, 1993 (Balloon Meister)**
- **2nd place: 2000, 2003**
- **3rd place: 2005, 2009**
- **4th place: 2007**
- **5th place: 1997, 1999**
- **9th place: 1998, 2006**
- **10th place: 1995**

North Central Regional Championship:

- **1st place: 2009**
- **2nd place: 2000**
- **5th place: 1999**



1988 U.S. NATIONALS BALLOON CHAMPION



ROB WITH CARL YOUNG