



Bob Waligunda

United States Ballooning Hall of Fame
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**"For once you have tasted flight,
you will walk with your eyes turned skyward,
for there you have been,
and there you will long to return."**

- Leonardo da Vinci

As a pioneering hot air balloonist in 1968, Bob has made unmatched contributions to the growth and professionalism of the sport alongside fellow commercial balloonists. He helped spearhead a surge of interest and enthusiasm that accelerated ballooning's expansion dramatically. His marketing brilliance -- bringing visibility, awareness and sustained promotion to both the sport and the industry -- remains unrivaled.

Bob entered the world of Hot Air Ballooning in 1968 with a rare combination of vision, determination and an instinct for opportunity. At a time when ballooning was just beginning its modern revival, he didn't simply join the movement -- he accelerated it.

From the very beginning, Bob surrounded himself with the sport's most influential pioneers. He built close relationships with figures like Ed Yost, whose innovations made contemporary balloon flight possible, and Pete Pellegrino, a respected legend in the field. These early alliances placed Bob at the center of ballooning's rebirth, and they gave him a front row seat to its future.

However, Bob was never content to observe -- he moved quickly to lead.

In his first year alone, Bob achieved what many could not achieve in a lifetime. Bob demonstrated an uncommon ability to blend vision with execution. He secured a key distributorship with Raven Industries, aligning himself with the most important manufacturer in the industry, positioning himself at the forefront of modern ballooning technology, manufacturing and sales. At the same time, he broke new ground by developing and organizing a passenger Balloon Ride program, with balloon, for Buddy Bombard's Chalet Club in New York City, bringing the magic of flight directly to the public. This initiative helped transform ballooning from a niche pursuit into a public experience -- bringing the wonder of flight to everyday people, introducing ballooning as a recreational experience to a larger audience, and setting the stage for the commercial ride industry that would follow.

Bob's entrepreneurial drive and ability to communicate a compelling vision soon attracted high-profile attention. He met with Malcom Forbes and sold him his very first balloon, igniting a spark that would become one of the most visible and influential ballooning passions in the world, one that would later bring international visibility to the sport, and helped Forbes become one of the sport's most visible champions. Through moments like this, Bob proved that not only could he build opportunities -- but that he could inspire others to believe in them.

Equally committed to mentorship, Bob invested in people. He trained and mentored future leaders, including Doctor Clayton Thomas and Bill Costen, helping to expand the community and ensure ballooning's future would be as strong as its beginnings.

On the commercial side, Bob once again demonstrated his forward-thinking approach. Long before experimental marketing became a standard business strategy, he recognized the promotional power of hot air balloons. Partnering with Spencer Oettinger, CEO of Melville Shoe Corporation, he developed a branded balloon program for CVS, a Melville Shoe owned company -- an innovative concept that positioned ballooning as a powerful tool for corporate identity and public engagement.

Well into 1969, Bob extended his influence even further -- into national media. Collaborating with Time Life Films, he transformed what they originally visioned as a short thirty second segment on balloons into a one-hour nationally televised special, The Great American Balloon Adventure. The broadcast captured the imagination of viewers across the country, introducing millions to the beauty, excitement, and potential of ballooning, helping to elevate the sport's profile and inspire a new generation of enthusiasts. It was documented in the United States Congressional Record.

It was a defining moment -- not just for Bob, but for the sport itself.

Throughout his career, Bob consistently demonstrated an ability to see what ballooning could become -- and then took the decisive steps to make it happen. He connected innovators, inspired influential figures, trained future leaders, and opened up entirely new avenues for growth in both recreation and business.

More than a participant in ballooning's modern rise, Bob was a catalyst.

His legacy is not only measured in the balloons he sold, the programs he created, or the people he trained-- but in the way he helped lift an entire industry into public consciousness. Through vision, action, and an unrelenting drive to move forward, Bob played a defining role in turning hot air ballooning into the vibrant, widely recognized pursuit it is today.

TIMELINE OF MANY OF BOB'S BALLOONING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- 1960** The year that Ed Yost completed his first free flight of his newly designed hot air balloon also marked the beginning of Bob's aviation journey, as he joined the Civil Air Patrol to officially learn how to fly.
- 1968** Started Balloon Enterprises, Inc. d/b/a Sky Promotions, after consulting with Peter Pellegrino and Ed Yost. Became life-long friends with both of these Ballooning icons.
- 1968** Met with Buddy Bombard of the Chalet Club to discuss future potential ballooning opportunities for his Club.
- 1969** Director at Phoenix House Spring Happening Charity in New York City. Tethered a balloon in Central Park and on Rikers Island.
- 1969** Tethered an illuminated Hot Air Balloon on Mill Rock Island in the East River, New York City, with commemorative postcard.
- 1969** Met with Malcolm Forbes to discuss ballooning exposure for Forbes Magazine. Sold Malcolm his first balloon, and later introduced him to Ed Yost for his Transcontinental Balloon voyage.
- 1969** Trained BFA Hall of Fame inductee Dr. Clayton Thomas and became life-long friends.
- 1969** As part of a balloon promotion at Springfield College, Bob met renowned television personality Art Linkletter, beloved by generations for his popular program, "Kids Say the Darndest Things." The two quickly formed a close friendship that endured for decades and lasted until Art Linkletter's passing in 2010 at the age of 97. Their bond was strengthened by a shared sense of adventure and humor. On one occasion, Art remarked to Bob "I've had many things in my life, but I've never had my own personal balloon pilot." The comment reflected both his affection for Bob and the unique friendship they shared.
- 1969** Fortune Magazine article with Spencer Oettinger of Melville Shoe Corporation regarding CVS contract.
- 1969** Chesapeake Appreciation Day, "Flight Across the Chesapeake," with Cooper Walker from Walker Wilson Travel Agency in Baltimore, Maryland.
- 1969** Initiated lawsuit against the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and State Fire Marshal for prohibiting balloon flights in Massachusetts and to other New England states.
- 1970** Second Place, St. Paul Winter Carnival Balloon Race competition in Minnesota.
- 1970** Participated in the South Carolina Tricentennial celebration, flying in numerous cities across the state, including Charleston, Columbia and Greenville, as part of South Carolina's 300th anniversary.
- 1970** Provided balloon and was talent for Sunbeam Bread television commercial.

- 1970** Bob participated in the U.S. National Balloon Championship qualifying rounds in Indianola, Iowa in 1970, 1971 and 1972.
- 1970** Tethered a hot air balloon at Bradley International Airport, formerly Bradley Field Airport, in Hartford, Connecticut, at passenger terminal gate for a television commercial.
- 1970** Prevailed in a landmark aviation court decision against the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and State Fire Marshal, allowing previously grounded balloons to resume flying within and from the state.
- 1970** Elected to the Balloon Federation of America (BFA) Board of Directors and Chairman of the Race Committee.
- 1970** Bob's initial discussion with Liggett & Myers laid the foundation for a national Lark hot air balloon program. In the years that followed, Lark became one of his most significant corporate sponsors, making substantial promotional and financial contributions to the emerging sport of hot air ballooning. The company supported major ballooning events, including sponsorship of a historic hot air balloon race in 1972 and the production of a documentary film, "Ballooning is a Lark," helping to bring unprecedented visibility to ballooning.
- At the time, cigarette advertising was legal, and full-page, color advertisements featuring the iconic Lark balloon appeared in leading national magazines. These highly visible campaigns introduced millions of Americans to the spectacle of hot air ballooning and demonstrated the power of corporate sponsorship in elevating the sport to a national audience.
- 1971** As Race Committee Chairman of the Balloon Federation of America, Bob secured a consequential partnership with Ed Yost to organize and produce The First World Hot Air Balloon Championship ever held in America.
- 1971** Half time balloon promotion with Joe Gerlach at Philadelphia Eagles/Buffalo Bills football game.
- 1971** Balloon appearance on Johnny Carson Show in Burbank, California.
- 1971** Featured in four pages of Life Magazine, including a two page photographic spread of the balloon crossing the Grand Canyon during "The Great American Balloon Adventure."
- 1971** Starred in "The Great American Balloon Adventure," a one- hour television documentary produced by Time Life Films in New York City for The Alcoa Hour, depicting Bob's cross country balloon flight and viewed by millions of people nationwide
- 1971** Received special mention in The Congressional Record. Vol. 117 No. 187.
- 1971** "To Tell The Truth" television show appearance with Garry Moore, for "The Great American Balloon Adventure."
- 1971** Worked with Ed Yost on a NASCAR-style Balloon Race Circuit and the RB-42 racing balloon as a follow-up to his Smirnoff Skyball balloon, flown in the Indianapolis 500 Speedway Balloon Race in 1967.
- 1972** Model of Bob's balloon "America" and artifacts of his Great American Balloon Adventure journey displayed in the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. 1972-1976.

- 1972** Bob founded the International Professional Balloon Pilots Racing Association to advance competitive excellence, emphasize safety as the cornerstone of the sport, and foster a professional standard, image and culture for balloon pilots and the ballooning community.
- 1972** Bob was determined to professionalize the sport and elevate professional standards "on and off the field," following the original charter of the Balloon Federation of America, "to promote ballooning and the safety thereof," established in 1960 by Ed Yost, Peter Pellegrino and Don Kersten. Bob founded the International Professional Balloon Pilots Racing Association (IPB), became an FAA Designated Balloon Pilot Examiner, and established one of the FAA's first approved balloon repair stations on the East Coast. He also developed a professional balloon pilot training curriculum and standards for pilot conduct and professionalism, following in the footsteps of Ed Yost, who stated when they created the BFA in 1960, "Balloons are precious! Make our organization likewise."
- 1972** Bob Waligunda and Ed Yost expanded the corporate structure of the First World Hot Air Balloon Championship from its original three members --- Bob Waligunda, Ed Yost and Sid Cutter --- by adding three additional directors with the intention to broaden leadership, strengthen governance and enhance the organization's ability to plan, manage and promote the First World Hot Air Balloon Championship.
- 1972** Director and producer of "The Lark 10th Anniversary St. Paul Winter Carnival Balloon Race," the oldest balloon race in the country, with national media coverage and a feature article in Sports Illustrated Magazine. The FAA had previously banned this event.
- 1972** Initiated the historic "Ballooning is a Lark" film documentary of the 1972 National Hot Air Balloon Championship in Indianola, Iowa, with Bob serving as Lark Pilot, spokesperson, model and technical director.
- 1972** Mechanix Illustrated article, Flight of the Lark Balloon.
- 1972** Popular Science Article, Flight to 10,000 Feet with Ozzie Street.
- 1972** Founded and directed "The Great Export 'A' Balloon Races" in Canada though 1975. staging events in cities including Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary and Edmonton. Participants featured legendary balloonists such as Ed Yost, Joe Kittinger and Jimmy Craig, with Host Canadian balloonist Larry Horack.
- 1972** Sports Illustrated article, Jan 7.
- 1972** Sports Illustrated article, September 25.
- 1972** Authored "The Aeronauts are Here" in Trenton Magazine, featuring tributes to Peter Pellegrino, Eddie Allen, Ed Yost, and the Balloon Federation of America (BFA).
- 1972** Coordinated a hot air balloon tethered at the National Mall in Washington, D.C. to commemorate the International Hot Air Balloon Aerogramme for the First World Hot Air Balloon Championship. Balloon "stamp" was to be issued at a later date.
- 1973** Sports Illustrated article, January 15.

- 1973** The First World Hot Air Balloon Championship featured 128 balloons representing 13 nations from around the globe. The competition was an outstanding success, generating worldwide attention and helping lay the foundation for the growth of international ballooning, including the launch of the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta the following year. Ed Yost and Bob Waligunda fulfilled their commitment to Don Kersten by delivering a safe, professionally organized, and highly successful event. Yost authored the competitive rules, and together they assembled an experienced launch crew and support team to ensure smooth operations and the highest standards of safety. Their efforts resulted in a first-class world championship that brought great credit to the Balloon Federation of America and earned the pride and admiration of the international ballooning community.
- 1973** Directed and produced "The Great Kentucky Derby Festival Balloon Race" in Louisville, Kentucky, which has become the oldest continuously held balloon race in the United States. The event grew into a signature attraction of the Kentucky Derby Festival, drawing international attention and helping to elevate the festival's reputation as a world-class celebration.
- 1973** Directed, created and produced "The Great Preakness Festival Balloon Race" in Baltimore, Maryland, featuring Ed Yost and Joe Kittinger in a historic flight across the Chesapeake Bay. Promoted as "The Race Across the Chesapeake," the event followed The Great Kentucky Derby Festival Balloon Race on horse racing's annual promotional calendar, further expanding the growing tradition of major ballooning events associated with the Triple Crown.
- 1973** Sports Illustrated article, May 21.
- 1973** Undoubtedly, Bob's leadership, vision and remarkable achievements in the field earned him national recognition. Sports Illustrated referred to him as the "Dean of American Balloonists" and "the most renowned aerostatic aviator in America," honors that reflected his profound influence on the growth, professionalism and advancement of ballooning.
- 1973** Collaborated with Warner LeRoy, son of Mervyn LeRoy, producer of "The Wizard of Oz," and grandson of Harry Warner, to create and develop the marketing program for the Great Adventure Balloon, helping to transform it into a highly visible and successful promotional attraction.
- 1973** Created and directed "The Great Worlds of Fun Balloon Race" in Kansas City, Missouri, with Lamar Hunt (Owner of the Kansas City Chiefs and Worlds of Fun) and Jack Steadman, President of Worlds of Fun, the first balloon race in Kansas City in over 60 years.
- 1974** Created and produced the "Triple Crown of Ballooning," modeled after the famed horse racing circuit, with Balloon Races held in conjunction with the Kentucky Derby Festival, the Preakness Festival and the Belmont Festival, featuring Dr. Clayton Thomas, and Ed Yost. The concept generated tremendous publicity and acclaim for its creative analogy, while significantly increasing public exposure and interest in hot air ballooning and competitive balloon racing.
- 1974** Introduced "The World's Largest Balloon," The Great Adventure, later to become "The Big One," with Warner LeRoy in Central Park, New York City, at an elaborate press conference creating exposure for The Great Adventure Theme Park and Safari in Jackson, New Jersey.

- 1974** Organized the "Kodak Colorama" balloon photo shoot with Ozzie Sweet featuring 10 balloons in Princeton, New Jersey. The award-winning image was later displayed as a giant 20 foot by 60-foot transparency in Grand Central Terminal as part of the famed Kodak Colorama exhibit in New York City.
- 1974** Tethered a balloon in front of the New Jersey State House in opposition to a proposed income tax, then launched the balloon from the site. Later prevailed in a lawsuit filed against the State of New Jersey after state aviation officials attempted to restrict balloon launches and landings within the state to licensed balloonports only.
- 1975** Bob was featured in the comic strip "Dondi," published by the New York Daily News and recognized as one of the five most widely syndicated comic strips in the country. Bob was thrilled by the exposure because it provided another opportunity to promote ballooning and demonstrate the professional side of the sport to the public. Three separate comic strips featuring Bob and ballooning were published.
- 1976** Created and produced "The Great Philadelphia Balloon Races" to celebrate the Birth of Aviation in America, as part of Freedom Week, with Mayor Frank Rizzo, which was an annual Balloon Race held in Pennsylvania through the early 90's.
- 1976** Created and directed "The Great Gannett Rochester Newspaper Bicentennial Balloon Race" in Rochester, New York.
- 1976** Created and directed the "Spirit of 76 Airshow Great Bicentennial Balloon Race" from July 30 through August 1. The event was held at Roosevelt Field in Nassau County, Long Island, New York, then known as the "Cradle of Aviation" for its historic role in pioneering aviation during the first half of the twentieth century.
- 1976** Tethered a balloon inside the Nassau County Coliseum in Uniondale, on Long Island, New York, for the Floyd Bennett Field Association for Gateway Airpark.
- 1976** Tethered the Great Adventure Balloon inside Hangar One at the Naval Air Technical Training Center for the Navy Bicentennial Exhibition in Lakehurst, New Jersey.
- 1976** Bob had set his sights on creating a National Collegiate Balloon Championship that would engage colleges and universities across the country in the sport of ballooning. To make the vision a reality, balloon clubs needed to be established on campuses nationwide. As part of this pioneering effort, Bob helped found the Princeton Balloon Club, giving rise to "The Flying Tiger," a balloon that became a symbol of collegiate ballooning and helped launch a new generation of enthusiasts into the sport.
- 1977** Pentax Camera Balloon tethered inside of the Baltimore Civic Center to promote the Preakness Cultural Festival.
- 1977** Created and directed "The Great New Jersey Transfair 77 Balloon Race" as part of New Jersey's Transportation Fair and Exposition Airshow in Atlantic City, New Jersey.
- 1977** Created and directed "The Great Brown and Williamson Tobaccoland Balloon Race" at the Virginia State Fair, precursor to the "Kool Pro Tour."
- 1978** Created and directed The Great Huntington Balloon Festival, in Huntington, West Virginia.

- 1978 Tethered the PaineWebber Balloon at the Statehouse in Hartford, Connecticut with Bill Costen.
- 1978 Created and directed “The PaineWebber Grand Prix of Ballooning,” Atlanta, Georgia, with Ben Abruzzo.
- 1979 The national ‘Great American Balloon Racing Circuit’ was formally introduced at a landmark national press conference held in Madison Square Garden in New York City—known as “The World’s Most Famous Arena.” The event featured four super-pressure hot air balloons suspended and tethered within the Main Arena, creating a dramatic backdrop for the announcement. Among the distinguished attendees were several of the era’s most prominent figures in ballooning, including the pilots of the historic Double Eagle II Atlantic Crossing, along with renowned aeronauts Ed Yost, Bill Costen, Vicki Harrison, and Sid Cutter.
- 1979 The Arnold Palmer Invitational, presented by Mastercard, marked an important milestone in professional golf when it debuted at Bay Hill Club and Lounge. For Arnold Palmer, the tournament represented more than a championship event—it was an opportunity to give back to the PGA Tour and the sport that had shaped his remarkable career. As Palmer reflected, “This indeed may be a way I could give something back to the PGA Tour.”
- Recognizing the promotional value of combining major sporting events with the spectacle of hot air ballooning, Bob created and directed “The Great Bay Hill Citrus Classic Balloon Race.” Conceived as a companion event to the Arnold Palmer Invitational, the race provided a colorful and highly visible attraction that enhanced the tournament’s public profile while pioneering a new model for corporate sponsorship in competitive ballooning. The event demonstrated how ballooning could serve as both an effective marketing platform and a public relations vehicle for major sporting organizations and sponsors.
- At a time when corporate sponsorship was becoming increasingly important in professional sports, PaineWebber embraced the marketing potential of hot air balloons through an extensive national promotional campaign managed by Bob. What began as a tournament-related program soon evolved into one of the most visible and successful balloon marketing initiatives of its era. PaineWebber expanded its sponsorship portfolio beyond PGA and Senior PGA tournaments to include balloon races, football games, tennis tournaments and eventually the inaugural “Skins Game” in 1983.
- The campaign operated a fleet of three specially branded balloons that traveled throughout the United States, providing high-profile exposure at major sporting events and public gatherings. Tethered balloon displays, promotional flyovers and a specially designed internally illuminated balloon for nighttime appearances, created a dramatic and memorable presence whenever the balloons appeared. The program became a benchmark for experimental marketing long before the term entered the corporate vocabulary, demonstrating the unique ability of ballooning to capture the public attention and generate media coverage.
- “The Great Bay Hill Citrus Classic Balloon Race” attracted many of the most influential figures in ballooning and aviation, including Arnold Palmer, Joe Kittinger, Ed Yost and Bill Costen. Their participation added prestige to the event and reinforced its importance within the growing balloon community.

More than a successful race, “The Great Bay Hill Citrus Classic” became a landmark example of how ballooning could be integrated with major sporting events to create mutually beneficial promotional opportunities. The event helped elevate the public image of ballooning, expanded corporate involvement in the sport, and further demonstrated Bob’s vision for using ballooning as a powerful platform for marketing, entertainment and public engagement.

- 1979** Created and directed The Great Atlanta Dogwood Festival Balloon Race in Atlanta, Georgia. To launch the event, a hot air balloon was suspended / tethered inside the Omni Hotel during a press conference. Invitations were uniquely packaged in boxes containing a helium balloon; when opened, the balloon would rise, carrying the invitation attached, creating a memorable promotional experience. The Grand Marshal of the Atlanta Dogwood Festival was Marlin Perkins, the celebrated host of Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom. Among the participating pilots was Bill Costen, a graduate of Morris Brown College in Atlanta. Remarkably, 42 years later, Bill was honored as the Honorary Grand Marshal of the Native Omaha Days Festival Parade in 2021. Fittingly, one of Bill’s favorite television programs throughout his life was Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom.
- 1979** Created and directed The Great Las Vegas Sun Pro Celebrity Balloon Race in Las Vegas, Nevada, an exciting event that paired celebrities with individual hot air balloons. Among the participants were Rocky Aoki, founder of the Benihana of Tokyo Restaurant chain, and Bill Costen of Sky Endeavors, flying the Stardust Hotel and Casino balloon, who took to the skies as pilots representing the International Professional Balloon Pilots Racing Association. The race was one of the several premier events featured on The Great American Balloon Racing Circuit, organized by Bob Waligunda of Sky Promotions. Notable pilots in attendance included Ed Yost, recognized as the Father of Modern Hot Air Ballooning, and Ben Abruzzo, famed for piloting the Double Eagle II---the first balloon to successfully cross the Atlantic Ocean.
- 1980** Bob worked with Woody Allen in 1979-1980 on what Woody considered to be one of his finest films, Stardust Memories, which was released on September 26, 1980. As part of the production, Bob was responsible for providing three identical hot air balloons for filming. Following the flight scene, Woody prepared to propose a champagne toast. Earlier, Bob had mentioned to him that a champagne toast is a long-standing ballooning tradition, so the moment had a certain ceremonial feel as everyone gathered and Woody raised his glass towards the sky. Just then, Bob noticed something floating in the champagne. Without missing a beat, Woody glanced into the glass and, in typical Woody Allen fashion, delivered the perfect line: “To 1980—a good year for cork.” The remark drew laughter from everyone present and perfectly captured his quick comedic timing.
- 1980** Introduced the “Westinghouse Flight Bulb” balloon suspended inside of Radio City Music Hall in New York City. The balloon was illuminated in total darkness at a press conference with the Rockettes performing on stage. This was one of Bob’s most ambitious projects. He conceived and designed the “Sky’s the Limit” Flight Bulb Program for the Commercial Lamp Division of Westinghouse, featuring a specially shaped hot air balloon that replicated the company’s light bulb product.

The comprehensive marketing campaign included retail trade sweepstakes, point-of-sale displays, on-site promotions, consumer rebates and a national advertising and merchandising effort. The program was supported by full-page, four-color advertisements in leading women's magazines and extensive media exposure. The balloon was piloted by the vivacious Vicki Harrison, who served as the campaign's spokesperson, conducting radio, television, and print media interviews across the country. Westinghouse selected Vicki for the role because marketing research indicated that women made the majority of household light bulb purchasing decisions. The campaign successfully combined aviation, advertising and public relations into a unique and highly visible national promotion.

- 1980** Created and directed "The Great Colorado Balloon Race at Ken-Caryl Ranch" in Denver, Colorado, as the centerpiece of a five-year promotional campaign designed to showcase Ken-Caryl properties. Featured participants included entertainer Flip Wilson and restaurateur Rocky Aoki, founder of Benihana of Tokyo, with Flip Wilson flying the Benihana of Tokyo balloon. To generate statewide publicity, a hot air balloon was tethered at an elaborate press conference held at the Colorado State Capitol in Denver with Chauncey Dunn.
- 1980** Created and produced "The Great Three Rivers Art Festival" in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, launching from the historic Point at the confluence of the city's three rivers. Featuring renowned balloon pilot Bill Costen, the event highlighted the spirit of creativity and community that defined the festival. The balloon race served as a spectacular centerpiece in the celebration of Pittsburgh's vibrant arts scene and commemorated the festival's 20th anniversary.
- 1981** Co-authored "The Great American Balloon Book: An introduction to Ballooning," published by Prentice Hall, with a foreword by Ben Abruzzo. Designed as a comprehensive guide for aspiring balloonists, the book was distributed to major libraries throughout the United States and abroad, and it provided readers with an accessible introduction to the history, techniques, and traditions of hot air ballooning.
- The publication included a history of ballooning, practical guidance on entering the sport, a code of ballooning ethics and etiquette for aeronauts, and a Balloonist's Baedeker containing official FAA requirements and a balloon pilot training syllabus. It also featured extensive resources, including directories of ballooning organizations, clubs, associations, manufacturers, distributors, dealers and other sources of ballooning information. Although some historical timeline inaccuracies were later identified, the book successfully fulfilled its primary mission as one of the era's most informative and influential introductory guides to the sport of hot air ballooning.
- 1981** The PaineWebber super-pressure balloon was suspended indoors at the opening of the new headquarters for the Philadelphia Stock Exchange in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- 1982** Created and directed "The Fifth Dimension International Balloon Spectacular" in Las Vegas, Nevada, held at the Las Vegas Convention Center. Bob served as the Launch Director, while Flip Wilson humorously assumed the role as the self-designated "Sky Cap." The highlight of the Spectacular came as the balloons ascended into the Nevada sky to the Fifth Dimension's hit song, as they sang "Up. Up and Away," creating a memorable fusion of music and aviation.

Renowned artist LeRoy Neiman attended the event and presented the Fifth Dimension with an original portrait depicting the group in a hot air balloon. The Balloon Spectacular received national exposure through a full-page advertisement in Time Magazine, further elevating the event's prominence and celebrating the growing popularity of hot air ballooning.

1983 Appeared on the popular children's television program, Captain Kangaroo, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, helping to introduce the excitement and adventure of hot air ballooning to a national audience.

1983 PaineWebber was a major sponsor of ballooning and played a significant role in supporting the PGA Tour's renowned "Skins Game." The inaugural Skins Game, an unofficial money event, was held at Desert Highlands in Scottsdale, Arizona, on the signature golf course designed by Jack Nicklaus, following the conclusion of and after the PGA Tour season. The event was traditionally played in November and December, and it continued through 2008. To promote PaineWebber's sponsorship, Bob tethered the PaineWebber hot air balloon at the tournament, modifying the original graphics display "PaineWebber Salutes the Skins Game" on one side and "Paine Webber Salutes NBC Sports" on the other.

The tournament featured four of golf's greatest legends—Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Tom Watson and Gary Player. NBC televised the event nationwide for two days, with legendary broadcaster Vince Scully and PGA Tour star Ben Crenshaw serving as commentators. Offering a purse of \$360,000, the Skins Game generated tremendous publicity and became one of the most successful made-for-TV franchises in sports history. Its television ratings consistently surpassed those of any major championship except for the Masters Tournament. As a result of Paine Webber's sponsorship, Bob was afforded the unique opportunity to dine with four golfing icons, thanks to John Lampe, PaineWebber's public relations spokesman. It was a memorable experience and another example of how ballooning opened the door to extraordinary people and events.

1984 Cover photo of The New Yorker Magazine with the Pumpkin Balloon.

1987 Created "The Great Hershey Park Pumpkin Balloon Festival" in Hershey, Pennsylvania featuring a distinctive pumpkin-shaped hot air balloon as its centerpiece. The festival was developed to help extend Hersheypark's appeal beyond the summer season by attracting visitors during the fall months. The unique event combined the excitement of ballooning with autumn-themed family entertainment, providing a successful promotional attraction that increased attendance and enhanced the park's visibility.

1987 Served as Director of "The Great Bloomsbury Balloon Race" in Bloomsbury, New Jersey, an annual community event that benefited more than 40 non-profit organizations. The Festival featured celebrated balloonist Flip Wilson and balloonist Elaine Balling. Under the leadership of Mayor Tom Connaughton, the opening ceremonies began in memorable fashion as he rode an elephant to the festival grounds. The event also included a unique wedding ceremony conducted from a hot air balloon, adding excitement and spectacle that made the race a cherished regional tradition.

1987 Created and directed "The Great Maryland State Fair Balloon Races" in Timonium, Maryland, featuring renowned balloonists Tom Nevison and Pat Michaels. Following the tremendous success and public enthusiasm generated by the Preakness Festival balloon events in Baltimore, the Maryland State Fair expanded the concept into a full-scale ballooning attraction. The event became a major Fair highlight and was presented under a seven-year commitment, drawing spectators from throughout the region, and further promoting the sport of hot air ballooning.

- 1987** Created and directed "The Philadelphia Constitutional Balloon Race" as part of the annual Great Philadelphia Balloon Race, celebrating both the birth of aviation and the nation's constitutional heritage. To emphasize Philadelphia's historic role in the founding of the United States, a special shape hot air balloon in the form of the Liberty Bell was commissioned and flown by Connie Wolf. The event combined the excitement of ballooning with a tribute to America's enduring symbols of freedom and democracy.
- 1988** Created and directed "The Great KQED Mercury News Balloon Races" in San Jose, California, which took place in 1988, 1989 and 1990 at the Mirassou Winery in San Jose to kick off the traditional July 4th celebration week. The races were Hare and Hound events with up to 18 sponsored balloons participating. Bob had Flip Wilson and Rocky Aoki competing in his 1990 event, with lots of fanfare and laughing. The sponsors were delighted as Bob and his team put together an advertising and merchandising package that provided great exposure for sales.
- 1988** Coordinated a high-profile promotional campaign for NBC by tethering the network's corporate hot air balloon in New York City's Central Park alongside Al Roker. The program also included a series of promotional flights and spectacular evening balloon glows at locations throughout New York City and New Jersey, generating public visibility and media attention for the network.
- 1991** Appeared on CBS television program, "Thrills, Chills and Spills" with Shayna Wolf, daughter of renowned sportscaster Warner Wolf, famous for his signature catchphrase, "Let's go to the videotape." As part of the show, Shayna experienced a series of high-adrenaline adventures, including a hot air balloon flight, a balloon bungee jump, and a parachute jump from an airplane. Bob accompanied her throughout these challenging and exciting endeavors, helping to ensure both safety and success during the televised event.
- 1991** Tiger Woods first rose to prominence at the Bay Hill U.S. Junior Amateur Championships, where a special friendship began between the young golfing prodigy and golf legend Arnold Palmer. Their relationship grew over the years, becoming one of the most admired mentor-protégé partnerships in the sport. Tiger would go on to achieve remarkable success at Bay Hill, winning the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard—one of our ballooning clients—an unprecedented eight times. His dominance at the tournament further cemented both his legacy and his enduring connection to Arnold Palmer, whose influence helped shape Tiger's extraordinary career.
- 1993** Provided several hot air balloons as the centerpiece attraction for the Midland Run in Far Hills, New Jersey. The event was organized to raise funds and awareness for the Midland School, a non-profit organization dedicated to serving children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Midland School provides specialized educational, therapeutic and support services for individuals with learning disabilities, communication disorders and behavioral challenges. Its mission is to offer a lifetime of care and opportunity to achieve the highest possible quality of life. The colorful display of hot air balloons helped draw attention to this worthy cause while creating a memorable and inspiring community event.

- 1993** Perhaps the greatest challenge of Bob's career came after the years of planning and preparation when he created and produced "The Big Apple Balloonfest" in New York City's Central Park. Bringing hot air balloons to the heart of New York City required navigating one of the most complex aviation environments in the world. Extensive coordination was necessary with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), as the New York metropolitan area is served by some of the nation's busiest airports, including John F. Kennedy International Airport, Newark Liberty International Airport, LaGuardia Airport, Teterboro Airport and Stewart International Airport.
- In addition to aviation approvals, the event required years of negotiations with New York City agencies to secure the numerous permits, waivers and regulatory approvals necessary to conduct such a unique operation safely and successfully. The effort approved worthwhile. Every balloon in the event was sponsored, generating tremendous national exposure. The event received national exposure through Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI) photographs, newspapers, radio broadcasts and television.
- Media support included legendary radio personality Cousin Brucie (Bruce Morrow) and WCBS-FM, while extensive television coverage was led by WNBC-TV, one of Sky Promotions corporate balloon clients.
- 2004** Balloon Expeditions LLC, an exclusive Hot Air Balloon Ride company serving the greater Philadelphia region. Passengers experienced breathtaking views of the Philadelphia skyline, the New Jersey shore and the scenic Delaware Water Gap, and on a clear day, New York City. Flights often featured memorable splash-and-dash maneuvers on the Delaware River, with journeys crossing from Pennsylvania into New Jersey. Adventures ranged from serene treetop-level cruising to soaring more than a mile above the earth, offering spectacular panoramic vistas and an unparalleled sense of freedom. Each flight provided a truly unforgettable, once-in-a-lifetime experience.
- 2004** Began work on the Stratobowl Historical Society project, dedicated to preserving and promoting the legacy of the Stratobowl as a National Historic Landmark. Collaborating with pioneering aeronauts and ballooning legends, including Ed Yost and Joe Kittinger, along with John Craparo and Bill Hughes, the project sought to honor the site's significant contribution to the history of high-altitude ballooning and aerospace exploration and the influence to sport ballooning.
- 2010** Collaborated with director Chantal Costen, Bill Costen's daughter, on the documentary "Balloon Man," chronicling the remarkable life of Bill Costen, the first African American Hot Air Balloon Master Pilot. The film follows Bill's inspiring journey from collegiate football and his time with the Buffalo Bills to becoming one of the most respected figures in ballooning. The documentary highlights Bill's unwavering faith, perseverance and determination in overcoming obstacles to achieve success in aviation. Contributed historical insights and conducted interviews for the film, including discussions with legendary balloonist and aviation pioneer Joe Kittinger, whose perspective added depth and historical content to Bill Costen's extraordinary story.

- 2013** Released “The Great American Balloon Adventure” DVD, featuring the acclaimed one-hour national television documentary produced by Time-Life Films in New York City. Originally broadcast in 1971, with a rerun in 1972, the film chronicles Bob’s historic cross-country hot air balloon journey, capturing the excitement, challenges and pioneering spirit of early ballooning. The documentary introduced millions of viewers to the adventure of lighter-than-air flight and helped establish ballooning as a growing aviation phenomenon.
- 2014** In 2014, Jack Guthrie invited Bob to return to Louisville and participate in the 41st Annual “Kentucky Derby Festival Balloon Race,” commemorating the inaugural race held in 1973. The Festival featured an elaborate program honoring the event’s rich history and its role in establishing one of the most celebrated ballooning traditions in the world.
- As part of the pre-race activities, they also discussed plans for the 50th Anniversary celebration of the Kentucky Derby Festival Balloon Race in 2023. To mark the occasion, Bob brought a few of the original pilots with him from the early years of the race. Before the morning race activities began, they launched in a special commemorative flight, rekindling the spirit of the pioneering days of ballooning. Participating pilots included Bill Hughes, Tom Oerman, Larry Horack, and Bob.
- 2019** Bob was invited to be a consultant to the New England Air Museum (NEAM), an American aerospace museum located adjacent to Bradley International Airport, in Windsor Locks, Connecticut. NEAM is home to the Silas Brooks balloon basket, the oldest surviving American-built aircraft, the Goodyear ZNP-K-28 Blimp Control Car—one of the only two surviving K-class control cars in the world, and the Sikorsky VS-44A—the sole remaining American-built commercial trans-oceanic four-engine flying boat.
- 2024** Inducted onto the “Wall of Fame” at his alma mater, Farmingdale Senior High School, in Farmingdale, Long Island, New York.
- 2026** Induction into the United States Ballooning Hall of Fame.

Timeline Synopsis

Bob Waligunda’s legacy is measured not only by the remarkable breadth of his accomplishments, but also by the imagination, creativity and promotional vision he brought to the sport of hot air ballooning. A true pioneer and visionary, Bob dedicated his life to advancing ballooning through spectacular events, innovative marketing campaigns, FAA leadership and service within the Balloon Federation of America. His tireless efforts helped elevate ballooning from a recreational pastime into a respected competitive sport and professional aviation discipline. Through his leadership, commitment to safety and passion for excellence, Bob inspired generations of pilots and enthusiasts while leaving an indelible mark on the history of aerostation. His influence continues to be felt wherever balloons take flight, serving as a lasting testament to a life devoted to the advancement of the sport he loved.

BALLOONING AND AVIATION HONORS

- 1968 Balloon and Fixed Wing Pilots License
- 1969 Raven Balloon Distributorship, President of Raven Balloon Distributor Advisory Board, Multiple Distributor of the Year Awards, through 1995
- 1970 Runner Up, Saint Paul Winter Carnival Balloon Race
- 1971 Board of Directors of the BFA and Race Committee Chairman
- 1972 Recognized in Congressional Record, Vol. 117, No. 187
- 1972 Great American Balloon Adventure display in the Smithsonian Air And Space Museum with a model of Bob's Balloon "America" 1972 – 1976
- 1973 Designated Colonel, Raven Squadron, South Dakota Balloon Corps
- 1973 Recognized by Sports Illustrated with National Balloon Accomplishments
- 1978 BFA Certificate of Recognition, US National Balloon Championships
- 2024 Wall of Fame Recipient, Farmingdale Senior High School
- 2026 Selected into the United States Ballooning Hall of Fame

BIOGRAPHICAL TIMELINE

- 1945 Born: August 23, 1945
- 1960 Joined the Civil Air Patrol
- 1963 Graduated, Farmingdale Senior High School, New York
- 1967 Undergraduate Degree, Springfield College
- 1967 NCAA All-American Wrestling Championship Honors
- 1968 Freshman Wrestling Coach, Springfield College
- 1968 Master's Degree, Doctoral Dissertation, Springfield College
- 1968 Founder, Balloon Enterprises, Inc. d/b/a Sky Promotions
- 2004 Founder, Balloon Expeditions LLC

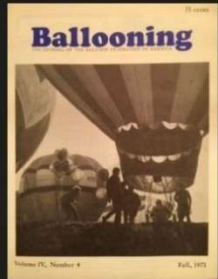
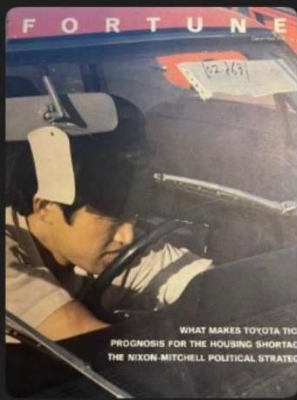
CHARITABLE ENDEAVORS

- **** Susan G. Komen Foundation
- **** Breakthrough T1D, formerly JDRF
- **** Make-A-Wish
- **** Midland School
- **** Blinded Veterans Association

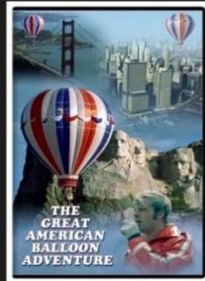
Highlight Events Presentation With Photos

Bob became one of the nation's most prolific originators and producers of major hot air balloon races and events. Throughout his career, he organized competitive ballooning championships, exhibitions, and press conferences that helped advance the commercial ballooning industry while promoting safety, professionalism, and higher operating standards throughout the sport. His commitment to elevating ballooning as a respected aviation discipline led him to found the International Professional Balloon Pilots Racing Association, an organization dedicated to advancing competitive excellence and fostering a professional image for the balloon pilots worldwide.

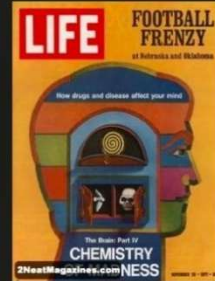




Ballooning Fall 1971



Great American Ball...



Life Magazine 11-71



National Air and Space Museu...



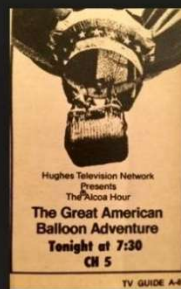
Bob Waligunda



Congressional Record 12-3-71



To Tell The Truth 12-14-71

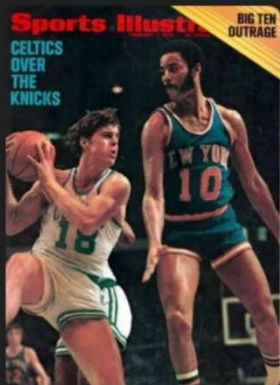


TV Guide 11-27-71



Time Life





Getting a high over St. Paul

THESE DAYS, THERE'S A LOT OF TALKING ABOUT THE "ST. PAUL EFFECT." It's the name given to the economic boom that has taken place in the city of St. Paul, Minnesota, since the mid-1980s. The city's population has grown by 10 percent, and its economy has expanded by 25 percent. The city's unemployment rate has fallen from 10 percent to 6 percent. The city's median household income has risen from \$15,000 to \$20,000. The city's per capita income has risen from \$10,000 to \$15,000. The city's poverty rate has fallen from 15 percent to 10 percent. The city's crime rate has fallen from 100 to 80. The city's quality of life has risen from 50 to 70. The city's overall economic health has risen from 50 to 70. The city's overall economic health has risen from 50 to 70.

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