

## Despite weather, 37th annual Red Rock Balloon Rally a success

Written by By Bernie Dotson For the Sun  
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### Two flights cancelled due to weather, OFFICIALS said

The 37<sup>th</sup> annual Red Rock Balloon Rally experienced two unexpected cancellations the past weekend, but still managed a fun time for everyone, officials said.

Bill Lee, executive director of the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce and president of the Red Rock Balloon Rally Association, said there were no flights Dec. 1 or Dec. 3 due to threatening weather conditions. The Dec. 2 schedule went off without interruptions.

This year's rally included pilots from as far away as California, Idaho and Florida, and there were at least two pilots that came from the United Kingdom. Gallup's balloon rally is one of two in New Mexico and one of the largest and most popular in the world.

"We did not fly Friday morning or Sunday morning due to weather conditions [winds]," Lee said.

But even without the balloon flights, the rally could boast success for other events that day.

"We did have the largest balloon glow we have ever had on Friday night at the 'Glow in the Rocks.' We had more balloons participate in the glow and the largest number of spectators that we have ever had for that event," Lee said.

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Lee said the “Dawn Patrol” and “Mass Ascension” shows on Dec. 2 were big successes. Each of the 135 balloons registered for the rally flew, Lee said.

“Many of the flights were over two hours in length,” Lee said. “We had a great crowd for the launch of the balloons.”

Lee noted that the “Pyramid Rock Run” was equally successful, with the run and walk event kicking off at 9 am while the balloons were still high amid Gallup’s red rocks. The morning parade and “Balloominaria” on Dec. 2 were crowd favorites, too.

Glenda Anderson of Thoreau was among the attendees of the Dec. 2 rally. “We have been coming to the balloon [rally] for almost five years,” Anderson said. “I like it. My kids like it. Sometimes it’s not good weather, but the parade is always fun to see.”

Lee said the balloon flights this time around were strictly from Red Rock Park in east Gallup and not the Fox Run Golf Course as in years past. The Red Rock Balloon Rally receives lodgers tax funds annually from the city of Gallup. The 2017 rally cost the association about \$90,000, a good portion of which was spent on mass advertising.

### **GOOD NUMBERS AT RALLY**

Lee commented that the 135 registered balloons this year was consistent with registrant numbers over the years. “In past years, we have had as many as 200 balloons, but we now focus on the quality of the event more than the number of balloons. Our goal is to have about 100 balloons each year and to build a much larger attendance from spectators.”

Lee said one of the things the association puts a lot of effort into is getting young people to come out. About 45 newcomers attended the rally this year, which bodes well for the future, Lee said.

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With respect to cancellations, Lee said weather, obviously, plays an important role. He said in the decades of putting on the Red Rock Balloon Rally, “We have had to cancel all three days and every event only twice.”

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For the Sun***