36th annual Red Rock Balloon Rally kicks off Dec. 2

Bill Lee wanted to create a new balloon image to draw in more tourists and onlookers at the city's annual Red Rock Balloon Rally. A partnership with the New Mexico Tourism Department allows just that.

Lee will fly a new balloon at this year's rally that features a sugar skull logo. In terms of what the balloon looks like, Lee noted that the New Mexico True logo and brand are on two sides of the balloon.

“We have a contract with the state Tourism Department that allows us to fly five events per year,” Lee explained. Lee owns and operates X-Treme-Lee Fun Balloon Adventures of Gallup. “When we showed the Tourism Department the design of the new balloon with the sugar skulls they wanted to have the New Mexico True logo on the balloon, too. We entered into an advertising contract with the department to have the logo placed on our balloon.”

Lee called hot air balloons “great marketing tools.” He said the sugar skulls are very popular and attract large crowds. “I have had people follow us in their cars to see where we land just to take a picture of it,” Lee said. “I have people requesting trading cards, pins and T-shirts of the balloon. There is no prettier place to fly in a hot air balloon than over the red rocks of Gallup.”

Lee said Samantha Brown of the Travel Channel flew in the newly-logoed balloon at the 2016 Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta. “While I am flying these people, I am interviewed about many things,” Lee said. “I make sure I highlight the culture, arts and outdoor adventure available in Gallup. Recently, we flew a travel writer (Chicago Tribune) from Chicago right here in the red rocks. Instances like this lead to national and international exposure (for the city) that really doesn’t cost anything. Many times a balloon ride is a ‘bucket list’ adventure for people.”

Gallup Mayor Jackie McKinney praised Lee for the years he has put into the Red Rock Balloon Rally.

“It’s a top tourist draw for Gallup – no doubt about it,” McKinney said. “There are tourists and balloonists that come from all around the United States and the world to see the rally. Bill Lee has helped make the balloon rally what it is today.”

Lee said Gallup has formally partnered with the state Tourism Department since the inception of the New Mexico True Campaign a few years ago. “Gallup was the first community to adopt the ‘True’ campaign and remains aligned with the department even as we develop our own brand of Gallup. Real.True.” The Gallup City Council formally OK’d the new marketing brand a couple of months ago.

“The state’s True campaign has benefitted Gallup with nationwide promotion. As I travel with the balloon across the Southwest, it is noted at various events that the balloon is from Gallup, New Mexico,” he said.

By Bernie Dotson
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