



Frank Bacon - Four Corners - 1976

Frank M. Bacon

Notable - Ed Yost Master Pilot Award

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I began my balloon experience in 1973 as a member of the ground crew for the Irish entries in the First World Hot Air Balloon Championships in Albuquerque; the Irish balloons were “Tar Baby” and “Yellow Peril.”

Bill Douglas, five other aspiring pilots and I formed the “Buffalo Chip Chapter of the Dublin Balloon Club” and went together to buy our first balloon, a used Piccard AX-6, “Ozone Ranger.” As some members dropped out over the years, new members joined, but more recently Bill and I were the only pilots from the club who remained active in ballooning. Unfortunately, Bill discontinued flying about five years ago due to failing eyesight.

My first flight as a student was April 1, 1973, with Michael Russo as instructor. My first solo flight was on September 23, 1973, with another solo flight on October 7, 1973. I flew as a student pilot in the AIBF on February 17, 1974, with Jim Toler as flight instructor, from the Fair Grounds, flying over the airport and landing on Isleta pueblo. I received my LTA pilot license on March 1, 1974, with Sid Cutter.

I have participated in every Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta since 1974 enjoying over 40 years of fun. During these years with about a thousand balloon flights I have taken hundreds of passengers on balloon rides, many for their first ballooning experience. I helped train several pilots in the early days, mostly new “Buffalo Chip” club members and friends. My most recent student was my son, Josh Bacon, who received his LTA license in 2008. Dozens of balloon rides have been donated to local charities for fund raising activities over the years. I have participated in a few balloon rallies away from Albuquerque: Farmington, Roswell, San Juan Pueblo and Gallup. I also joined one of my Irish friends and flew his balloon at the Bicentennial of Ballooning in Annonay, France, in 1983.

The current balloon, “Sun Flyer,” is our fifth balloon. The first three were Piccard AX-6 balloons, and the last two Raven/Aerostar S-55A models. “Sun Flyer” was designed in 1996 with the aid of students at Los Ranchos Elementary School through the APS “Join A School” program. The students were asked to help design a balloon with a New Mexico theme. The “Zia” symbol design and the “Sun Flyer” name were based on the suggestions of two of the students. Because of our partnership with the students at Los Ranchos, we fly each year from Los Ranchos Elementary School as part of the “Albuquerque Aloft” flights prior to Fiesta, continuing a tradition of introducing new students to “their” balloon.

I have had no accident or FAA enforcement actions regarding my ballooning activities. I have a commercial pilot LTA Free Balloon, HAB w/airborne heater, certificate number 256563729.

I am a graduate in electrical engineering from Georgia Tech with a PhD thesis in atomic physics. I retired from Sandia National Labs in Albuquerque in 2007 after a forty-year career in nuclear weapon component design. In that role I published numerous technical articles in nationally recognized technical journals. Since retiring I have published several magazine articles on family history and genealogy, and have recently published two articles in "Ballooning" magazine on the impact of propane evaporation on balloon operations.

The best part of ballooning for me these days is flying with my son and little grandsons and maintaining contact with an active group of young people as balloon crew, where I learn things like what LOL and BFF stand for. My wife, Cindy, and I have an empty nest except for two Yorkie terriers and a cat. Our grown children, three daughters and one son, have altogether six boys, our grandsons, ages 5 to 14. We enjoy travel and looking after our local grandsons, or visiting with our grandsons and their families in North Carolina.



Ozone Ranger
1973-74



Rainbow Warrior
1985-90



Sun Flyer
Since 1996



La Desengrapadora
1974-85



After Midnight
1990-96



Bacon Pilots and Crew Chief (Josh, Frank and R.J.)
Balloon Glow – 2010



Frank Bacon with Al Roker and Crew
NBC Today Show - 2008



Frank Bacon and Bill Douglas - 2006