July 27, 2014
Ed Yost Master Pilot Award
Balloon Federation of America
P.O. Box 400
Indianola, IA 50125

Dear BFA:

I am recommending Bob Sparks of Slatington, Pennsylvania for the Ed Yost Master Pilot Award. The requirement for this award is 40 years of LTA piloting experience. 40 years from 2014 would be 1974.   I believe Bob was licensed in Lighter-than-Air in 1970.

My dad, Tony Fairbanks, bought a Western 65,000 cu.ft. Hot Air Balloon from Gerry Turnbull in England in early 1973.   Since November 1971, I was a licensed lighter-than-air pilot but my experience was solely in gas balloons.

Bob Sparks was a mentor to me. He provided encouragement and guidance in the piloting of hot air balloons. In 1973 Bob and I began flying our balloons together. Bob in the Lark Cigarette balloon and I in the Ladybug. We flew from various locations in Chester County, Pennsylvania and other places as Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1973 and for the Hawkins brothers' balloon festival in Sebring, Ohio in 1973.

Of great interest to me but perhaps a story of bravery and adventure that has been lost or ignored by the ballooning community are the two Atlantic Ocean crossing attempted by Bob Sparks. The Yankee Zephyr on August 7, 1973 and the Odyssey on August 21, 1975.   There should be a book published, articles written and presentations at safety seminars about these two attempts.

Participating in ballooning festivals and at safety seminars, Bob and I have remained friends through the years.

 For six or seven years through 2011, Bob Sparks was flying the large passenger carrying balloons for the United States Hot Air Balloon Team in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. By larger balloons I refer to 210,000 cu.ft. to 250,000 cu.ft. To fly the large passenger carrying balloons require a different level of skills than the sport balloon pilot. During these years my involvement in ballooning has been one flight each year as a passenger. Bob flew 78 hot air balloon flights last year.

Sincerely,

Michael Fairbanks
301 London Pointe Ct
Virginia Beach, VA