



## UNITED STATES BALLOONING HALL OF FAME

A Partnership of the Balloon Federation of America and the National Balloon Museum

### Candidate Information Form

**Date Submitted:** February 7, 2018

**CANDIDATE NAME:** Nicholas M. Saum, Ph.D.

**Address:** Deceased

**Briefly describe the basis for the submission:** Nicholas M. Saum, PhD, contributed selflessly to the field of aviation, and aerostation in particular, over the course of a long and colorful career. He set dozens of World and National Records in Altitude, Distance and Duration in a rozier balloon he built himself. He authored the *Propane and Fuel Management* handbook for the BFA, and contributed to the *Balloon Flying Handbook* published by the FAA.

He served on the launch teams of many of Steve Fossett's circumblobal balloon attempts, as the crew chief and launch director for the German team on the Chrysler TransAtlantic balloon race, and on Kevin Uliassi's J. Renee circumglobal attempts. He taught many students how to fly both hot air and gas balloons, and served as an FAA Designated Examiner for balloons.

While Nick prided himself on his irascible manner, he was the first to step up to service, to support fellow aeronauts, to research, experiment and publish in the field of safety, and to lend his considerable intellectual prowess to the growing body of knowledge in our sport.

**Provide references:** Identify at least two individuals who can speak to the quality and significance of the achievement, and to the character of the candidate.

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**Reference Name:** John Kugler

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## CANDIDATE HISTORY:

Nick's PhD was in geology, and he was employed in that field for many decades, for small and large corporations and educational institutions, as well as many years of self-employment. He began flying airplanes in 1956 and balloons in 1976.

For a number of years, Nick flew the commercial balloon circuit with the Coors and Toyota balloons. He served as a Designated Pilot Examiner for the Federal Aviation Agency, an FAA Accident Prevention Councilor, and holder of an FAA Ground Instructor rating. He reached Level VII (the highest level) in the Balloon Federation of

America's Pilot Achievement Award Program, held the BFA Master Instructor Rating, and was an Accident Investigator for the BFA. He was a life member of our organization.

One of Nick's most memorable quotes was published in Time Magazine in 1990. Nick said, "If God wanted women to fly, he would have painted the sky pink." While many in our sport remember that quote, not as many knew of the total, unconditional, generous support Nick gave to women pilots. He had little use for those who played the woman card in attempting to advance their flying careers. (For that matter, he had no use for anyone who played any card other than skill, practice and determination.) But a woman serious about her craft and her skill could count on Nick for counsel, coaching, guidance, onsite tech support, and research assistance.

Because Nick's accomplishments are so many, we present some of them here in chronological order. He was born in Chicago in 1933, served in the US Army, and graduated from Iowa State University and the University of Missouri. Upon receiving his PhD in geology, he moved to Golden, Colorado to work with the Colorado School of Mines. Nick's first balloon ride came in 1975. In Sportsman Pilot magazine (summer, 2004), he was quoted as saying, "About ten weeks later I owned a balloon, and about six months after that I had Coors as a sponsor. I ended up with four Coors balloons and several pilots. We toured the country advertising Coors beer... I worked for Coors for four and a half years, but was still working as a consulting geologist, so I finally quit."

In the late 1970s, Nick flew a 77,500 cf balloon for Coors in competitive events from Balloon Fiesta to regional distributor conventions, a Missouri-Nebraska football game, the Missouri Oklahoma football game and a Denver Broncos game. In 1978 he won the Lake Landing race, Farmington, New Mexico, and the coyote-roadrunner competition at Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta.

Nick was later hired to fly a Toyota balloon for a television commercial, and that company hired him for what became a 14-year commitment for flights in the United States and South Africa.

In 1981 Nick flew as a pilot at the US National Hot Air Balloon Championship in Indianola, Iowa, and at the 1984 Nationals, he was selected by the competitive pilots to receive the Grover Windsor award, given to a pilot who represents the spirit of ballooning.

On August 18, 1984, sponsored by Denver Region Toyota Dealers Association, Nick set World Altitude records for AM-2 through AM-15 in the red and yellow Toyota balloon which he designed and built. He also set AM-2 through AM-6 World Distance and Duration records in the same flight.

By 1985, his competitive skill and experience earned him the appointment of Championship Director of the US National Hot Air Balloon Championship in Indianola. He would reprise that role in 1988, after serving as Championship Director at the Battlecreek Balloon Festival in 1987.

In 1986 Nick participated in the South Africa Invitational Balloon Festival, featuring 42 balloons from seven countries.

The first World Rozier Balloon Championship launched from Mitchell, South Dakota in 1990, in conjunction with the World Gas Balloon Championship. Nick took home the Rozier crown in a homebuilt balloon, one of two homebuilts flying that year.

On November 9, he flew 343 miles in 17 hours 42 minutes to set AM-2 through AM-6 National Distance and Duration records, and the World Distance record for those classes. His flight would be noted on the National Aeronautic Association's Ten Most Memorable Record Flights list for 1990.

Nick's always careful and thorough notes on that flight show his character. "Taking off was somewhat traumatic as I had never flown alone at night before except for a short period in Mitchell that was really an early morning launch. This was going to be in total darkness until the moon rose at about 4:00 a.m.

"The balloon was cooling, I was ballasting, mom nature was winning and I was not climbing. There was a power line coming up. I heaved a bunch of ballast, 40 lbs to be exact... I was on the radio to John Davis, my NAA Observer and also my mentor for this flight. He didn't have any trouble staying calm in answering my unspoken pleas for any advice on how the hell to keep from aborting this flight in the dark. Of course, he couldn't ask me what the hell I thought I was doing up there, but I sure did again." Courage and humor were two of Nick's many and strong personality traits.

On January 12, 1991, Nick set the National Rozier Altitude record for AM-2 through AM-15 in a homebuilt balloon. Launching from Burlington, Colorado, Nick kept a detailed flight log of altitudes, temperatures, ballast, condition of the envelope, weather, icing conditions, crew positions and flight track, which are attached to this nomination. Nick's terse notes tell an exciting tale of ballasting, altitudes, decision making, and time management. At 11,500 ft, his log reads, "There goes one world record." Here are some of the later entries:

- 13,500 ft.: "Temp. 30°, 40 lbs ballast remaining, making tough decisions."
- 13,000 ft.: "40 lbs ballast remaining, running liquid propane out over side, lost time unhooking burner."
- 13,450 ft.: "Might be getting hypoxic, although I do not feel any of the symptoms."
- 13,600 ft.: "Pulse 100, still valving off propane, still have 40 lbs ballast."
- 14,450 ft.: "Still valving propane, slightly short of breath but not having any difficulty."
- 14,750 ft.: "There goes a bunch of world records."

- 15,120 ft: “Burner hooked up, lot of exertion (panting), probably slightly hypoxic, going for a little bit more altitude.”
- 16,080 ft: “Have had radio turned off because of all the propane falling into the basket. Still have 40 lbs ballast.”
- 16,250 ft: Just got cold enough to see breath, basket temp screwed up, shear.”
- 16,300 ft: “1.7 gal fuel, time to get the hell out of here!”
- 16,360 ft: “I’m going after that extra 130 feet.”
- 16,600 ft: “Burner off, stomping in basket (for barograph). 1.5 gallons, radio on.”
- 12,500 ft. “Sand flying all over inside basket, sure glad I’m not wearing my contacts.”
- 11,000 ft: “20 lbs ballast, shear.”
- 4,500 ft: “1.2 gal fuel, burner control, 10 lbs ballast, 2 miles from crew, time to land.”

He later noted that he had the presence of mind to rig the anti-sail line, looking at wires ahead of him, and did a drag rope landing. “Crew grabbed me, got the drag rope all dirty. Standup damned landing.” Said landing took place in Syracuse, Kansas.

It would prove to be a good year for Nick Also in 1991, Nick authored Propane and Fuel Management for the Balloon Federation of America Safety Committee and Education Committee. His extensive education and experience in the subject made it a text for the ages, and balloonists still refer to it today. Parts of it were quoted in the Balloon Flying Handbook, published by the Federal Aviation Administration.

Not content with these accomplishments, Nick jumped into the burgeoning NH3 community with Tim Cole, Dennis Brown and John Kugler. This group designed and built several balloons to fly with the tremendously inexpensive ammonia gas, readily available as fertilizer in the farmlands of the desert plains. The number of aeronauts who received their gas ratings after training in ammonia balloons with Nick and the “Fly Fertilizer” pilots has proven a major contributor to the resurgence of gas ballooning in the United States.

At the BFA Annual Meeting in 1991, the BFA Board presented Nick with the Shields Trauger award, the highest award given in the United States for our sport. The summer of 1992 saw Nick spending several weeks in Bangor, Maine, as Crew Chief and Launch Director for the German team of Chrysler Transatlantic Balloon Race, which launched in the pre-dawn hours of September 16 from Bass Park at the Bangor Raceway. Nick was in charge of the ground, logistical and launch details for the team of Jochen Mass, Erich Krafft and Use Schneider.

In the early 1990s, one of Nick’s notorious hard landings got the better of him. Flying in South Africa, he smote the earth unusually firmly and broke his back. His doctor told him that if he valued the activity of walking, he must quit ballooning.

He did not stroll off peacefully into retirement. He bought several small airplanes launched a banner-towing business that kept several pilots employed, including himself. He also built and highly modified a turbo prop Legend airplane, and the company that designed it incorporated many of his modifications in future models.

Nor did he leave the sport of ballooning. The Riverton (Wyoming) Rendezvous invited him to be their celebrity speaker at that state’s prestigious event. The BFA Board appointed him to the position of BFA Safety Committee Chair in 1998, and to serve as Safety Officer at the US Hot Air Balloon Championship, Rantoul, Illinois in 1998.

Throughout the 1990s, he served as consultant, launch co-director and key crew member for Steve Fossett's circumglobal balloon flight attempts, in Seoul, Korea, the Stratobowl of South Dakota and from St. Louis.. He also contributed his skill and experience to Kevin Uliassi's J Renée circumglobal attempt out of Illinois.

Over his decades in the sport, he served the Colorado Balloon club in many ways, publishing the newsletter, organizing flying events, planning parties, and teaching others how to fly. While he called himself a Male Chauvinist Pig, and laughed at the reactions his chauvinist comments brought forth, he employed women pilots, supported women pilots' record attempts, and fired and rehired them as many times as he did their male counterparts.

While Nick's intelligence and experience were among the greatest in our sport, he never wore them on his sleeve. Instead, he cared more for his dogs than his records, and gave more to the world than it ever gave him in return.

For his service to the sport, for his accomplishments in it, and for his devotion to aerostation, we nominate Nicholas Mather Saum, Ph.D, to the Ballooning Hall of Fame.

