

**BALLOON FEDERATION OF AMERICA
HALL OF FAME COMMITTEE
RECOMMENDATION FOR INDUCTION IN 2017**



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 16, 2016

CANDIDATE NAME: Bob Waligunda

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Briefly describe the basis for the submission:

As a young teenager, Bob Waligunda focused his attention on aviation by working for his fixed wing pilot's license as a member of the Civil Air Patrol. In 1968, while in college he saw his first balloon and started training the next morning with Charles MacArthur. Shortly thereafter he founded his own balloon business, Balloon Enterprises Inc. doing business as Sky Promotions, headquartered in Springfield, Massachusetts and then Princeton, New Jersey. Sky Promotions would eventually grow to become one of the nation's largest balloon marketing and management companies and implemented corporate balloon marketing programs for many Fortune 500 companies. He went on to become a pioneer in American ballooning and the originator and producer of many major balloon races throughout the country. Bob is the co-author of *The Great American Balloon* book and has been featured in magazines such as *Life*, *Fortune*, *Mechanix Illustrated*, *Popular Science*, and *Sports Illustrated*. Undoubtedly, his leadership and impressive achievements in the field earned him titles, according to *Sports Illustrated* as "the dean of American balloonist" and "the most renowned aerostatic aviator in America. Bob is a past member of the BFA Board of Directors and was chairman of the early Race Committee.

Provide references:

Reference Name: Mick Murphy **Telephone or E-mail:** Info@aerblarney.com

PERSON MAKING THE SUBMISSION:

Name: Mick Murphy

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CANDIDATE HISTORY:



Robert L. Waligunda

Bob Waligunda was born on August 23, 1945 in Monterey, California. His family moved to Long Island, New York, and he enrolled in Springfield College in Massachusetts where he received his B.S. Degree in 1967 and his Master’s Degree in 1968.

While in college, Bob was an All American wrestler and runner up in the NCAA College Wrestling Championships. He went on to become the Freshman Wrestling Coach at Springfield College in 1968 while working on

his Master’s Degree, and met his wife Kathy at that time. They have four (4) children, Laurie, Rob, Catherine and Mary, and six (6) grandchildren. Laurie and Catherine are attorneys, and Rob is a Senior Marketing Director at Knol, Inc. in East Greenville, Pennsylvania. Mary is the Director of Talent Acquisition for ESF Camps in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.

Bob was always an adventurer, with awe for all things that fly. His many activities included, aside from ballooning, canoe racing, the piloting of airplanes and ultralights, sky diving, hang gliding, scuba diving and bungee jumping, just to name a few.

As a young teenager, Bob focused his attention to aviation by working for his fixed pilots license as a member of the Civil Air Patrol. He saw his first balloon while at college, and started training the next morning with Charles MacArthur.

Shortly thereafter, Bob founded his own balloon business, Balloon Enterprises, Inc. d/b/a Sky Promotions, headquartered in Springfield, Massachusetts and then Princeton, New Jersey. This would grow to become one of the nation’s largest balloon marketing and management companies with an impressive clientele of national accounts. Sky Promotions would eventually create, design and implement corporate balloon marketing programs for many Fortune 500 companies. Bob himself went on to become a pioneer in American ballooning and the originator and producer of many major balloon races throughout the country.

Bob is co-author of The Great American Balloon Book, and has been featured in magazines such as Life, Fortune, Mechanix Illustrated, Popular Science and Sports Illustrated. He received special mention in the Congressional Record for his starring role in “The Great American Balloon Adventure”, an Alcoa Hour television documentary, produced by seven-time Emmy award winner Dennis Kane, and filmed by Time Life Films, depicting his continental crossing of the United States – via Hot Air Balloon – from San Francisco to New York. A model of Bob’s well-traveled balloon was displayed in the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC.

In addition, Bob’s balloons have been featured in numerous television commercials, quiz shows, comic strips and movies, including Woody Allen’s “Stardust Memories”. His balloons came in all shapes and sizes, from huge hot air balloons carrying a logo or message (he built the world’s largest balloon at the time for Warner LeRoy and Great Adventure), to special shaped hot air balloons, to helium filled advertising blimps and inflatable replicas of popular consumer products. Bob had four (4) balloons tethered inside of Madison Square Garden in New York City in 1979, and the Westinghouse “Flight Bulb” tethered inside of Radio City Music Hall in New York City in 1980.

Bob also ran the largest and oldest full service balloon company on the east coast, featuring “Up ‘N Away Airlines”, the world’s only “Balloon Airline”. He also provided a complete balloon pilot training facility and FAA certified repair station.

From training flyers to recruiting celebrities to the sport, Bob has been involved in every aspect of ballooning. His efforts to promote ballooning to a professional level were highlighted by starting the International Professional Balloon Pilots Racing Association (IPB) where he was an instructor and FAA designated flight examiner, organizing balloon events to spotlight professionalism. Earlier in his career, he filed and won a major court decision with the State Fire Marshall in 1970 which allowed balloons, previously grounded, to be flown in Massachusetts.

Undoubtedly, Bob’s leadership and impressive achievements in the field earned him titles, according to Sports Illustrated, as “the dean of American balloonists” and “the most renowned aerostatic aviator in America”.

Bob is a past member of the Board of Directors of the Balloon Federation of America, and Race Committee Chairman for the same. He was a Distributor for Raven Industries and then Aerostar International, at the time the world’s oldest and largest balloon manufacturing company, and a member of the Distributor Advisory Board for the same.

Presently, Bob is President of The Great American Balloon Adventure, LLC, a Life Member of the Balloon Federation of America, a member of the National Aeronautic Association (NAA), the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA), the Airplane Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) and The Lighter Than Air Society (LTA).

Many of Bob’s Ballooning Accomplishments

1968 Started Balloon Enterprises, Inc. d/b/a Sky Promotions, after consulting with Peter Pellegrino and Ed Yost, and came to be life- long friends of both of these ballooning icons.

- 1969 Director of Phoenix House Spring Happening in New York City, and tethered a balloon in Central Park and on Mill Rock Island in the East River
- 1969 Balloon promotion at Springfield College with Art Linkletter
- 1969 Fortune Magazine article with Spencer Oettinger of Melville Shoe Corporation regarding CVS
- 1969 Provided the balloon and was talent for a Sunbeam Bread television commercial
- 1969 Chesapeake Appreciation Day “Flight across the Chesapeake” promotion with Cooper Walker in Baltimore, Maryland
- 1970 Prevailed in court decision against State Fire Marshal which allowed hot air balloons, previously grounded, to be flown in Massachusetts.
- 1970 2nd Place, St. Paul Winter Carnival Balloon Race
- 1970 Tethered balloon at Hartford Airport at Passenger Terminal Gate for TV commercial
- 1971 Half time balloon promotion with Joe Gerlach at Philadelphia Eagles/Buffalo Bills football game, and appearance on Johnny Carson Show in Burbank, California
- 1971 Four (4) pages in Life Magazine including feature article in crossing the Grand Canyon in a balloon.
- 1971 Starred in “The Great American Balloon Adventure”, filmed by Time Life Films for the Alcoa Hour
- 1971 Received special mention article in the Congressional Record, Vol. 117, No. 1874
- 1972 Model of Bob’s balloon “America” displayed in the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in DC
- 1972 Designated FAA Balloon Examiner
- 1972 Director, “The ‘Lark’ St. Paul Winter Carnival Balloon Race”, with support from Matt Wiederkehr
- 1972 “Ballooning is a Lark” film, ‘Technical Director’ and starring role, National Balloon Championships
- 1972 Mechanics Illustrated article, Flight in the Lark Balloon
- 1972 Popular Science article, flight to 10,000 feet with Ozzie Sweet
- 1972 “To Tell the Truth” TV appearance
- 1972 Established FAA Balloon Repair Station
- 1972 Started “The International Professional Balloon Pilots Racing Association” (IPB)
- 1972 BFA Board of Directors member, Race Committee Chairman
- 1972 Started, Director, Export ‘A’ Balloon Races in Canada in Montreal, Three Rivers and Quebec
- 1972 Sports Illustrated article, February 7
- 1972 Sports Illustrated article, September 25
- 1972 Authored article in Trenton Magazine, “The Aeronauts are Here”, with tributes to Peter Pellegrino, Eddie Allen, Ed Yost and the BFA.
- 1972 Balloon flight from the Mall in Washington, DC, to commemorate the International Hot Air Ballooning Aerogramme that was to be issued at The First World Hot Air Balloon Championships
- 1973 Sports Illustrated article, January 15
- 1973 Sports Illustrated article, May 21

- 1973 Started, Director, the Great Kentucky Derby Festival Balloon Race, Louisville, Kentucky
- 1973 Worked with Warner LeRoy (father Mervyn was the producer of The Wizard of Oz) in creating and designing the Great Adventure Balloon Program and later toured the East Coast with the “Balloon”
- 1973 Started, Director, The Great Preakness Festival Balloon Race, Baltimore, Maryland, where Joe Kittinger flew with Bill Hughes
- 1973 Director, The Great Export ‘A’ Balloon Races in Canada in Winnipeg and Brandon, Manitoba, where participants included Ed Yost, Joe Kittinger, Ed Keuser, Jerry Melsha, Jimmie Craig and Bill Hughes
- 1973 Created and developed The First World Hot Air Balloon Championships with Ed Yost and Sid Cutter
- 1973 Created and Director, “The Great World’s of Fun” Balloon Race in Kansas City, Missouri, with Lamar Hunt (owner of The Kansas City Chiefs and World’s of Fun) and Jack W. Steadman, the president of World’ of Fun, the first balloon race in Kansas City in over 60 years.
- 1974 Introduced the “World’s Largest Balloon” at the time, the Great Adventure, with Warner LeRoy in Central Park in New York
- 1974 Created and produced “The Triple Crown of Ballooning”, a takeoff on the horse racing circuit, with races at The Kentucky Derby, Preakness and Belmont Festivals, featuring Dr. Clayton Thomas and Ed Yost
- 1974 “Kodak Colorama” Balloon Shoot with 10 balloons in Princeton, NJ where photos were displayed in 20 by 60 foot transparencies in Grand Central Station in New York City, featuring Malcolm Forbes
- 1975 Featured in “Dondi” nationally syndicated comic strip series
- 1976-91 Created and produced The Great Philadelphia Balloon Races, starting with “The Great Constitutional Balloon Race”, featuring the special shape balloon “Liberty Bell” with Connie Wolf, and The “Bicentennial Balloon”, with Mayor Frank Rizzo.
- 1976 Director, the Gannett Rochester Newspaper Bicentennial Balloon Race in Rochester, New York
- 1976 Balloon tethered inside of the Nassau County Coliseum in Uniondale, Long Island, New York, for the Floyd Bennett Field Association for Gateway Airpark
- 1976 The Great Adventure Balloon tethered inside of Hangar One at Naval Air Technical Training Center for the Navy Bicentennial Exhibition in Lakehurst, New Jersey
- 1977 Pentax Balloon tethered inside of Baltimore Civic Center to promote Preakness Cultural Festival
- 1977 Great Adventure Balloon tethered inside of the Atlantic City Convention Hall promoting the “Transfair 77” Exposition and Airshow
- 1977 Created and directed the New Jersey Transfair ’77 Balloon Race as part of New Jersey’s Transportation Fair, Exposition and Airshow in Atlantic City, NJ
- 1977 Created and directed “The Great Brown and Williamson Tobaccoland Balloon Race” at the Virginia State Fair in Richmond, precursor to the “Kool Pro Tour”
- 1978-79 Director, The Great Huntington Balloon Festival in Huntington, West Virginia

- 1978 Tethered the Paine Webber balloon at the Statehouse in Hartford, Connecticut, with Bill Costen
- 1978 Created and Director, The Paine Webber Grand Prix of Ballooning, Atlanta, Georgia, featuring Ben Abruzzo
- 1979 Created and Introduced “The Great American Balloon Racing Circuit” in Madison Square Garden in New York with four (4) balloons tethered inside the main arena
- 1979 Director, The Great Bay Hill Citrus Classic Balloon Race, Orlando, Florida, with Ed Yost, Joe Kittinger and Bill Costen (former Buffalo Bills defensive tackle)
- 1979-82 Director, The Great Atlanta Dogwood Festival Balloon Race, Atlanta, Georgia. Tethered a balloon inside of the Omni for a press conference
- 1979 Director, The Great Las Vegas Sun Pro Celebrity Balloon Race, Las Vegas, Nevada
- 1980 Balloons featured in Woody Allen’s movie, “Stardust Memories”
- 1980 Introduced the Westinghouse “Flight Bulb” tethered inside of Radio City Music Hall in New York City. The balloon was illuminated in total darkness with the The Rockettes performing on stage.
- 1980-85 Created and directed The Great Ken-Caryl Colorado Balloon Races in Denver, Colorado, with comedian Flip Wilson and Rocky Aoki, owner of Benihana of Tokyo Restaurants, flying the Benihana Balloon, and a tethered balloon at the State Capitol with Chauncey Dunn
- 1980-81 Created and produced The Great Three Rivers Arts Festival Balloon Race, Pittsburgh, PA
- 1981 Co-author, The Great American Balloon Book, an Introduction to Ballooning, published by Prentice Hall, with a Forward by Ben Abruzzo
- 1981 Balloon tethered indoors at the opening of the new headquarters for The Philadelphia Stock Exchange, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- 1982 Created and directed The 5th Dimension International Balloon Spectacular in Las Vegas, Nevada, with Flip Wilson as the launch director at the Las Vegas Convention Center and The 5th Dimension singing “Up, Up and Away” as the balloons took off. LeRoy Neiman presented the 5th Dimension with an original portrait.
- 1983 Appeared in Captain Kangaroo TV series in Philadelphia, PA
- 1987 Creator and Director, The Great Hershey Park Pumpkin Balloon Festival, Hershey, PA
- 1987 Director, The Great Bloomsbury Balloon Race, Bloomsbury, New Jersey
- 1987-93 Director, The Great Maryland State Fair Balloon Races, Timonium, Maryland
- 1988-90 Director, The Great KQED Mercury News Balloon Races, San Jose, California
- 1988-90 Director, The Great Atlanta Dogwood Festival Balloon Race
- 1988 Tethered the NBC balloon in Central Park with Al Roker
- 1991 CBS Television show, “Thrills, Chills and Spills” with Shayna Wolf
- 1994 Created and produced “The Big Apple Balloonfest” in Central Park, New York, with an evening balloon glow on the Great Lawn.
- 1995 Director, “The Big Apple Balloonfest” in New York City, with balloons lifting off from Central Park and flying out of the city.
- 2004 Started Balloon Expeditions, LLC

- 2004-13 Worked on Balloon Historical Society project for a Stratobowl National Park Landmark with Ed Yost, Joe Kittinger, Bill Hughes and John Craparo.
- 2012 President, The Great American Balloon Adventure, LLC
- 2013 Release of DVD, The Great American Balloon Adventure
(thegreatamericanballoonadventure.com)

Ballooning and Aviation Honors

- 1969-95 Several Distributor of the Year Awards, Raven Industries
- 1970 2nd place, St. Paul Winter Carnival, St. Paul, Minnesota
- 1971 Honored in Congressional Record, Vol. 117, No. 187
- 1972 Honored with model of Balloon “America” display in Smithsonian Air and Space Museum
- 1973 Colonel in the Raven Squadron of the South Dakota Balloon Corps
- 1978 BFA Certificate of Honor and Recognition, US National Hot Air Balloon Championships

Biographical Timeline

- 1945 Born August 23, 1945
 - 1967 B.S. Springfield College, Springfield, Massachusetts
 - 1968 Freshman Wrestling Coach, Springfield College
 - 1968 Master’s Degree, Springfield College, Springfield, Massachusetts
 - 1968 President, Balloon Enterprises, Inc. d/b/a Sky Promotions
 - 1969 Teacher, Longmeadow Middle School, Longmeadow, Massachusetts
 - 1969 Distributor, Raven Industries, Sioux Falls, South Dakota
 - 1998-2003 National Federation of Independent Business, Territory Manager
 - 2004 President, Balloon Expeditions LLC
 - 2008-10 Director of Sales and Marketing, Prime Image, Inc
 - 2011 Director, Visual Connections, LLC
 - 2012 President, The Great American Balloon Adventure, LLC
 - 2013 Director of Sales, GreenTec-US
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