



Elizabeth (Beth) Wright Smith

Notable – Accomplishments/Contributions, Ed Yost Master Pilot Award

Beth truly comes from an aviation background. Not only is she a distant relative of the Wright Brothers, but her father became involved in ballooning in the mid-1960s when only a handful of pilots existed in the US. She earned her pilot certificate in 1978 and has since accumulated well over 4000 hours.

Before becoming a full-time balloonist, Beth earned degrees in Special Education and Social Work, and then taught at preschool, elementary and junior high levels for several years.

Beth makes her home in the Balloon Capital of the World, Albuquerque, New Mexico. She has flown in many parts of the country and in Canada and has flown balloons of many different makes and sizes. In addition to being one of the few female corporate pilots, she is qualified to fly the large 8-12 passenger balloons. She flies special shape balloons, too, which can be difficult to fly since they are not designed for aerodynamics. She is also rated in gas balloons.

Since 1983, Beth has worked with balloon companies across the West. Beth worked full-time for World Balloon, long considered one of the top balloon companies in the US, from 1987-2003. World Balloon, a full-service balloon company providing balloon sales, corporate programs, balloon repairs, passenger flights and student pilot training, was sold in early 2004. Prior to that, she served as Director of Operations until 1997 when she became part owner of the company. Currently, as the owner of Airborne Heat, LLC, Beth continues to balloon full-time, flying corporate flights, student pilot training and passenger flights and is a dealer for Cameron Balloons US. After flying for and organizing the balloon programs for many other corporations, in 2006, Beth joined the Wells Fargo Balloon Team as Chief Pilot. In addition to working on logistics for the Team, she flies all of the Wells Fargo balloons including the massive stagecoach special shape balloon, Cent'r Stage.

Years ago, Beth was certified as a Balloon Federation of America Master Instructor. She presently owns, operates and is the Chief Instructor for one of only a few FAA certified pilot training schools for balloons in the United States. She has trained students from all over the world, including those from the FAA, and is a frequent speaker at balloon safety seminars, civic organizations and schools. Her strong interest in safety led her to become an FAA Aviation Safety Counselor, a position she had held since 1992. She is currently part of the FAA's safety program, FFAST. She obtained Level VII (the highest level) in the BFA Pilot Achievement Award Program and Level X in the FAA Pilot Proficiency Award Program. She has been the Chief Inspector for World Balloon's FAA Certified Repair Station, where she was also an FAA Repairman. Currently she is certified as a Repairman for Aerco, a long-time repair station in Albuquerque. In addition, she serves as an FAA Designated Pilot Examiner, giving check rides to those wanting to obtain a balloon rating.

Although not lately, she occasionally found time to compete and has been a member of Albuquerque's competition club, Top Gun, and the BFA Competition Division.

Beth is a former two-term board member of the Balloon Federation of America. In the past she has also helped organize local rallies. She has served on the Albuquerque Convention and Visitor's Bureau Tourism Advisory Board. Beth has served 9 years on the board of the AAAA, the largest balloon club in the world. She served as AAAA Vice President for 8 of those years and is still very involved with the AAAA Education Committee. She served multiple terms on the Board of Trustees for the Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum near Balloon Fiesta Park, serving as Chairman through 2014. She is a recipient of both the AAAA Sid Cutter Award for contributions to ballooning and the Ruppenthal Education Award.

Beth received the Ed Yost Master Pilot Award at the Balloon Federation of America Annual General Meeting on October 7, 2018 in Albuquerque.

