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Events preceding Balloon Fest starting with essay contest this month

For the 16th consecutive year, the QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning and PNC Bank will be bringing the magic of ballooning to children and families alike throughout the state.

Pre-Festival events begin this month with a statewide essay contest and run through July's annual event, the largest summertime hot air balloon and music festival in North America.

This year's 35th annual QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning in Association with PNC Bank will take off July 28- 29-30, 2017 from Solberg Airport in Readington.

Named one of the Top 100 Events in North America six times, the Festival attracts upwards of 165,000 people and worldwide media coverage as a showcase event for the Garden State.

"We've worked with PNC to create exciting promotions that are still going strong since our relationship began 15 years ago," said Festival Executive Producer Howard Freeman. "The 'PNC Salutes America' special-shaped American flag hot air balloon was an immediate hit and remains one of our most popular balloons. We've added new components that have enabled PNC to consistently deliver their message while providing experiences that people of all ages enjoy each and every year."

"We have been very pleased to continuously sponsor the QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning in Association with PNC Bank every year since 2002," said Joe Whall, PNC Senior Vice President and Director of Client & Community Relations. "The magic of ballooning - and music, and food, and summer family fun - is something we look forward to every year."

"Our sponsorship has enabled us to connect with people in fun and meaningful ways, from educating young children on how they can start saving their money to providing unique life experiences to children who may not have the opportunity to see a hot air balloon in person," added Whall. "We enjoy bringing the festival into the community and having a positive impact throughout the state."

The Festival and PNC will launch the nation's Flag Day celebrations on June 14 with the "PNC Salutes America" special-shaped hot air balloon; at 53 feet tall, 78 feet across and 29 feet deep, it is the largest free-flying American flag in the world.

"The American flag balloon was created right after 9/11 and branded the 'PNC Salutes America' balloon," said Freeman. "We inflated it for the first time on Flag Day 2002 and it was tremendously received. We then paired it with the QuickChek American Eagle balloon at the Festival and each time the Eagle and the Flag took flight to 'God Bless America,' tens of thousands of people stood and applauded."

To help introduce children to PNC and encourage their love of country, the PNC Bank "American Patriot Essay Contest" was created in year two of the sponsorship. Thousands of school children in grades 2-12 across the state write about "What the American Flag Means to Me" each year with the winner receiving a ride in a balloon at his or her school in June and again at the Festival in July.

In year three, the Festival teamed with the PNC "Grow Up Great" school readiness program to provide hundreds of pre-school children in inner cities ranging from Newark to Trenton with the opportunity to learn about the world around them by exploring a balloon in person. These cold-inflated balloon events take place each May and June.

PNC Bank will once again present one of this year's main concert headliners, offer children's interactive activities in the PNC Grow Up Great Mobile Learning Center, and provide Festival attendees with convenient access to on-site ATMs.

The QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning in Association with PNC Bank creates innovative marketing programs in which companies can maximize an attendee's experience through family entertainment, attractions and the introduction of new consumer products and services. These range from mobile marketing, product display and sampling opportunities to signage on 75-foot-tall hot air balloons that fly during six scheduled mass ascensions in helping brands rise above the clutter in the heavily saturated New York-Philadelphia media market.

For additional information please visit www.balloonfestival.com.

This item was submitted by Russ Mensch.