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Meet Glo, the woman flying a giant panda this summer



Glo Kohoe prepares to fly a hot air balloon. Kohoe has flown multiple special shape hot air balloons and will fly the Unique Photo Panda at the 2017 QuickChek Festival of Ballooning. (courtesy photo)

BY ANGELA LINGG

One flight. That's all it took. After one hot air balloon ride in Albuquerque, Glo Kehoe was hooked on flight -- via a hot air balloon.

Following her newfound passion, at 30 Kohoe packed up her life in Chicago and moved to Albuquerque to become a hot air balloon pilot.

Now with 37 years of flying experience, Kohoe has distinguished herself as a premier pilot. This year she will be flying the Unique Photo Panda Bear at the [QuickChek Festival of Ballooning](#), being held July 28-30 at Solberg Airport.

Kohoe said she collects teddy bears, so the 110-foot panda is a perfect fit for her.

Over the years, Kohoe has flown several special shape balloons, including a beer bottle, soda can, truck, strawberry and a cake. The largest special balloon Kohoe has flown was the energizer bunny balloon measuring 166 feet tall. That's 15 feet taller than the Statue of Liberty.

Flying the massive special shape balloons takes skill and careful planning.

Koheo said the ascent in a special shape balloon must be slower than in a typical teardrop-shaped balloon to prevent the balloon from bending. Flying a balloon the size of the Statue of Liberty also requires a larger landing site.

Howard Freeman, the executive producer of the festival, said the hot air balloon pilots like flying at Solberg Airport because there is plenty of room to fly whatever direction the wind carries them, which is important for the special shape balloons.

"You can fly pretty much 360 degrees around," Freeman said.



The 34th QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning launched Friday, July 29, 2016, at Solberg Airport in Readington. (photo by Kathy Turpin | for NJ Advance Media)

Some 100 pilots are scheduled to fly at the festival. Only seven of the pilots are women, but for Kohoe being a female pilot isn't big deal.

"It really isn't a big difference because it's such a small community. Everybody helps everybody. There really isn't a lot of animosity or prejudice," Kohoe said.

During her 37 years of flying, Kohoe has booked over 25,000 hours of flying time. She has flown in Australia, New Zealand and she spent a summer flying in France.

"Ballooning has been so good to me," Kohoe said.

While flying the SeaWorld Shamu balloon, Kohoe took a boy for a ride to see the whales as part of the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Kohoe said she will always remember taking off from the SeaWorld parking lot and seeing "the whales just lined up waiting for us."

Just as she fell in love with hot air balloons during her first flight, Kohoe said she enjoys watching people experience the same thrill.

"It's always fun to take up somebody who's never seen a balloon before," Kohoe said. "They're just in awe."

After being absent from the festival for the last few years, Kohoe said she is excited to return to the QuickChek festival to fly hot air balloons.

"It's a great festival to go to," Kohoe said. "It's like a family, a ballooning family."

The QuickChek Festival of Ballooning is July 28 to 30. Tickets can be purchased at QuickChek stores or online at <http://www.balloonfestival.com/>

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