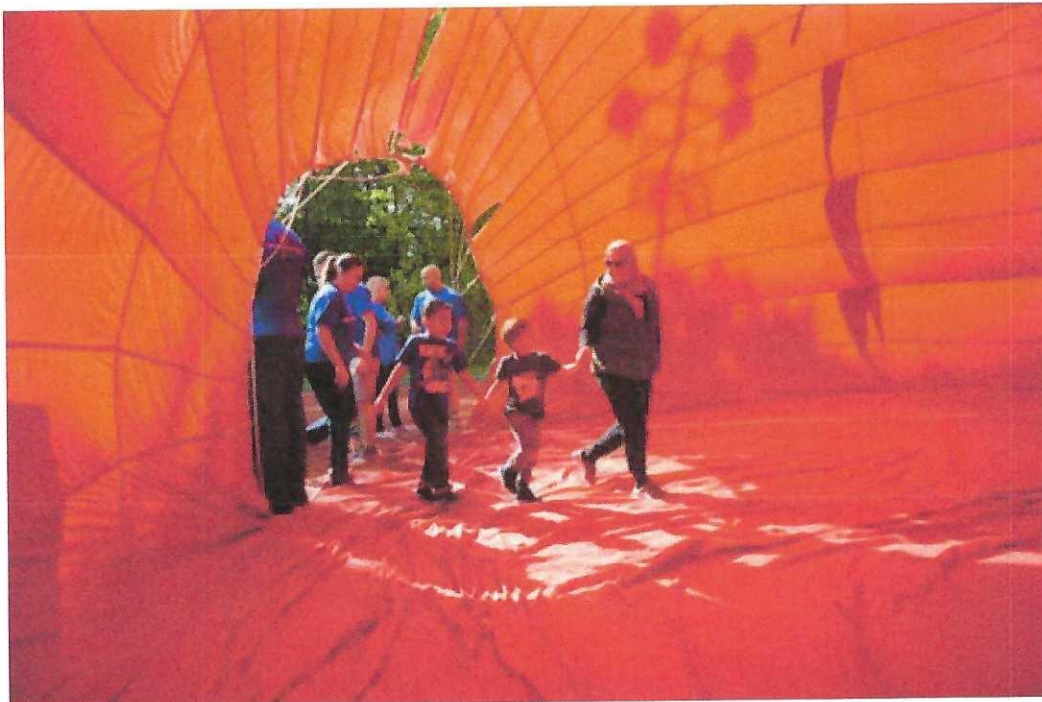


JUNE 12, 2019

North Jersey preschoolers learn about and play inside massive hot-air balloon

Isaiah McCall, North Jersey Record



As dozens of preschoolers made their way towards the massive red balloon sitting on the edge of the Passaic County Technical Institute Soccer Field, their eagerness to explore every inch could be felt.

When asked, "Who's ready to go inside?" cheers erupted and almost every hand was raised. Kids entered in pairs, and then, all madness broke loose as they blissfully pranced around the inflated balloon.

"This is so cool, I would definitely go up in a balloon one day," said Samuel Marconi, 5, as he ran around with his friends.

The 50 preschool school students from the Center For Family Resources in Wayne, spent their Wednesday morning actively learning about and playing inside a 75-foot-tall hot-air balloon.

"It's important to bring balloons to kids and give them an opportunity to learn about the magic of ballooning, said Howard Freeman, executive producer of the 37th Annual QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning. "The physics are easy -- hot air rises --but for them to walk around in the balloon and actually experience it is always awesome for them."



The QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning and PNC Bank inflated a 75-foot-tall air balloon for children in the Wayne Center for Family Resources to play in on Wednesday, June 12, 2019. The children help deflate the balloon. (Photo: Amy Newman/NorthJersey.com)

The hot-air balloon, which is no longer used to fly has been touring preschools in New Jersey and is used in PNC's "Grow Up Great" bilingual early education program.

The program was started in 2004 to help bilingual kids under age five develop a passion for learning.

"We're building on these kid's educations now to make them more successful in the future," Said Peggy Iucolino, the client and community relations assistant director at PNC. "We believe learning at this early age means we'll only have better leaders later on."

The kids learned everything from what hot-air balloons were made of to how to pack them away; something they all enjoyed as they stampeded all over the balloon to deflate it.

"This was so much fun," remarked Ahmad, 5, as he finished packing the balloon away with his friends.

What's Next

This Friday, Freeman and his team of balloon experts will inflate "The PNC American Flag balloon," the world's largest free-flying American flag to launch the nation's Flag Day celebrations and honor female veterans. The ballooning events are being held in advance of the 37th New Jersey Festival of Ballooning, which will be held July 26-28, in Readington, NJ.

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Kids play in hot air balloon

The QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning and PNC Bank inflated a 75-foot-tall hot air balloon for children in the Wayne Center for Family Resources to play in on Wednesday, June 12, 2019.

PHOTO GALLERY by Amy Newman

