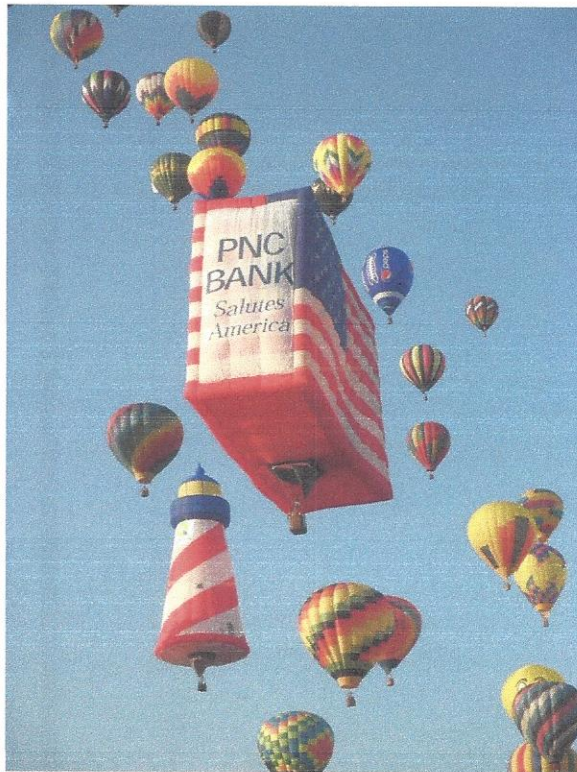


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## Students invited to ‘air’ ideas on what the American flag means to them



*The QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning and PNC Bank invite New Jersey students in grades 2 through 12 to take part in the 16th annual PNC Bank “American Patriot Essay Contest” by writing a short essay on the topic “What the American Flag Means to Me.”*

By [Community Bulletin](#)

The QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning and PNC Bank invite New Jersey students in grades 2 through 12 to take part in the 16th annual PNC Bank “American Patriot Essay Contest.” Students who would like to participate are asked to write a short essay on “What the American Flag Means to Me.”

The grand prize winner will receive the opportunity to take two rides in a hot air balloon. The first is a tethered ride in a 75-foot-tall hot air balloon in front of their classmates at their school in June. The second will be a ride in one of the 100 hot air balloons at this year’s 37th annual QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning in Association with PNC Bank July 26, 27 and 28 at Solberg Airport in Readington.

The festival VIP grand prize package includes a hot air balloon ride for two, four Blue Sky Club VIP tickets, and the opportunity to meet one of this year's concert headliners.

This year's winning student's immediate classmates will each receive one complimentary general admission ticket to the festival. Second-place and third-place prizes consisting of festival admission and merchandise will be also awarded. The winning student's teacher and school principal will each receive two Blue Sky Club VIP tickets.

All teachers in the state who submit a group of 15 essays or more on behalf of their students will receive two free general admission tickets to the festival regardless of whether one of their students submits the winning essay.

The increasing popularity in learning about one's ancestry played a major role with last year's grand prize winner. Peter Clear, a fifth-grade student from John Hill School in Boonton, wrote about being a descendant of William Brewster who came to Plymouth, Massachusetts, on the Mayflower.

"We receive thousands of very personal, heartfelt essays from students who are inspired by the American flag and the very specific meaning it has to them," said festival executive producer Howard Freeman. "They write how the flag reminds them of a beloved family member or how it is part of their everyday lives. We look forward to this year's entries and wish to thank all of the educators who take the time to encourage their students to take part in this contest."

"The PNC American Patriot Essay Contest gives students across New Jersey the chance to display their love of country and their skill with words," said Joe Whall, PNC senior vice president and director of client and community relations. "We are delighted to continue to support the essay contest as part of our overall sponsorship of the QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning in Association with PNC Bank. Talent and patriotism are indeed alive and well in the Garden State."

The essays must be 100 words or less. They will be judged by a panel of representatives from PNC Bank and the balloon festival. Winning essays will be selected based on creativity, poignancy and clarity with consideration given to the grade level of the contestant. Contestants are not required to be U.S. citizens.

Entries should be mailed to Essay Judges, QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning, 363 Route 46 West, Suite 200, Fairfield, NJ, 07004, or emailed to [pncessay@balloonfestival.com](mailto:pncessay@balloonfestival.com). Entries should include the student's name, home or school address, home or school telephone number, grade, age, school name and the name of their teacher. The deadline to enter is May 1.

Additional information may be found at [www.balloonfestival.com/pncessay](http://www.balloonfestival.com/pncessay).