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NJ Festival of Ballooning grounded by coronavirus pandemic



The coronavirus pandemic has claimed another large event as the New Jersey Festival of Ballooning has been canceled for 2020.

The festival, which earlier moved this year's event at Soleberg Airport in Readington from July to October, said uncertainly over the size of the crowd that would be allowed at the festival made the decision the "reasonable and responsible thing to do," organizers said in a statement.

"We were hoping to use this as a community healing event. In fact, we even had a pharma company that was going to do a nice thing on Friday, Oct. 16 to take care of first-responders and neighbors and all that kind of stuff. We gave it our best shot." festival Executive Producer Howard Freeman told New Jersey 101.5.

Even before the novel coronavirus pandemic hit, Freeman had mulled canceling the festival, after losing long-time sponsor QuickChek. The state Lottery eventually stepped in as a sponsor, seeming to save the event.

"We don't make the timeline. The virus does. You just have to adapt and cope and look forward to next year in July," Freeman said.

It will be the first time since 1983 that the festival will not take place.

Freeman said that besides Gov. Phil Murphy's executive order limiting outdoor gatherings to 500, the list of states from which people must quarantine for two weeks when entering New Jersey was also a concern. New Jersey now requires quarantines for anyone coming from 34 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

"We draw from all around the country, obviously heavy from the Tri-State area. How irresponsible would it be to bring in 150,000 plus people who might be responsible for a spread?" Freeman said.

The festival already lost concert headliner Styx and will start from scratch for 2021 for its musical lineup.

"You can expect a lot of pent-up demand. You can expect 150,000 'balloonatics' looking forward to seeing 100-plus balloons ascend. We have a couple new balloons that were going to unveil this year like a unicorn and a sloth, and a few other surprises we working on," Freeman said.

The festival joins a growing list of large events that have been canceled for the fall season.



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