



2026 Balloon Classic presented by Aultman

WHEN: July 24, 25 and 26

To All Balloon Classic Pilots:

We are celebrating our 41st anniversary of this incredible event that has entertained Stark County and surrounding areas since 1986. We owe you, the pilots, all the credit for its success for the past 40 years and look forward to welcoming you back for our 41st year. Ben Miller will be returning once again to act as Balloonmeister for this summer's event.

I know this letter is quite lengthy, but we would like to share with you some of the changes for 2026 as well as important dates. It is important for you to read this document in its entirety before submitting your Pilot Application Form online. Please pay close attention to this year's event information and pilot amenities.

Invitation

We would like to invite you to Canton, Ohio, on **July 24-26, 2026**, for the Pro Football Hall of Fame Enshrinement Festival's ***Balloon Classic presented by Aultman***. You will be warmly welcomed by enthusiastic spectators throughout the weekend activities.

About the Pro Football Hall of Fame Enshrinement Festival

The Enshrinement Festival features diverse events enjoyed over two and a half weeks. Highlights of the activities include the Hall of Fame Game, Enshrinees' Gold Jacket Dinner, Grand Parade, Enshrinement Ceremony, and Concert for Legends. All of these festivities are for the purpose of celebrating the enshrinement of a new class into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. This class will be announced on Thursday, February 5th during the NFL Honor's Show.

Event Classification

The Balloon Federation of American (BFA) has published ***Balloon Event Guidelines***. We intend to adhere to the principles and safety issues outlined in that publication. In evaluating our event regarding the event classification system provided by this publication, the Event Director and Safety Officer are in agreement that this event would be classified as Advanced (Level 3). Pilot applicants should become familiar with the BFA publication and be comfortable with the suggested pilot skill set required for this type of event.

Entry Fee

All participating pilots must submit with their application a non-refundable entry fee of \$100.

Event Amenities

Participating pilots receive propane (arrive full, leave full), first class hotel accommodation, coffee and donuts for morning briefings hotel-provided breakfasts (6-10 AM) and event-provided pilot and crew dinners, top notch competition, a guaranteed travel stipend and glow stipends and prize money for the top five competitive finishers. Regardless of weather-related conditions precluding any flight activity all pilots are guaranteed the travel stipends.

Application Information (Deadline: May 29, 2026)

The online pilot application will be filled through **WatchMeFly** this year. Participants will need to create an account on WMF in order to submit the online pilot application. If you do not have an account on WMF, please go to <https://www.watchmefly.net/> to create one and then select the ***Pro Football Hall of Fame Enshrinement 2026 Balloon Classic presented by Aultman*** page. Please contact Ben Miller at twblesd14@gmail.com if you have any questions. Otherwise, if you require a paper copy of the application please let us know.

Participation in this year's event is budgeted at **forty (40)** balloons and based on available sponsors, that number may be slightly adjusted. We will be sending acknowledgement letters to accepted pilots no later than June 12, 2026. You will be notified at that time if you have been accepted into the event as a participating pilot as well as Media Flight or Night Glow, if you choose to register for these activities. Although applications are accepted based on several criteria, we encourage you to submit your application early. We will maintain a waiting list once we have reached our limit.

Pilot Selection Criteria

Those participating in prior years' events, demonstrating experience with congested flying, assigned sponsor feedback and early registrants are only a few of the attributes the Committee considers when accepting pilot applications. Decisions of the Committee relative to participants are final. **Flying in this event involves congested areas, and pilots registering should be comfortable with this type of flying.**

Competition

Competitions will be run as individual events with Team Competition no longer being used. All competitive pilots must be registered with WatchMeFly.net. **BFA/HACD members receive free tokens for our event competition. If you select to compete and are not an HACD cardholder you will need to pay for the BLA entry token on the app. The cost is usually around \$10.00.** Our competition will be utilizing Watchmefly.net for all competition related scoring and official communication. The competition will involve the use of the Balloon Live App and electronic monitoring for PZ monitoring and tasking. Competitors may use a personal cell phone, tablet or the Balloon Live Sensor for this purpose.

Fiesta pilots are not required to use the Balloon Live App for participation in this event. However, it is highly recommended that you utilize apps such as HotAir to record and log your flights during the event.

Insurance

The Pro Football Hall of Fame Enshrinement Festival requires that each participating pilot names the sponsoring organization, Championship Director and Safety Officer as additionally insured on their policy. **You must submit a copy of your insurance policy endorsement listing the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce/Pro Football Hall of Fame Enshrinement Festival as "Additionally Insured" by July 1, 2026.**

Every pilot is required to have a minimum of \$1,000,000 combined single limit coverage, \$100,000 minimum property damage, and \$100,000 minimum passenger liability for each passenger.

On-site Registration

Registration for all pilots will be held Friday, July 24th, 2026, from 2:00 pm to 5:15 pm at the Courtyard by Marriott. All pilot packs and gifts, tickets, maps, banners, etc. will be distributed at that time. If you find that you will be unable to make registration by 5:15 pm, you must make alternative arrangements by calling Sydney Klein or Ben Miller.

Pilots who are traveling more than 25 miles and intend on arriving Thursday evening for participation in the Friday Morning Media flight will receive a complimentary hotel room for that evening. Please let Sydney know if you plan on arriving early.

Balloon and pilot documents (pilot certificate, annual inspection, balloon registration and airworthiness certificate) will be examined during on-site registration. Pilots will be asked to provide documentation that they have a current flight review and are current in accordance with 14 CFR part 61, §61.56 and §61.57. In addition, upon signing the pilot application, the pilot certifies that they have no known medical, mental or physical impairments or conditions nor are they taking prescription or over the counter drugs/medications that may impair their ability to safely fly their aircraft.

Corporate/Commercial Balloons

A Corporate/Commercial Balloon is a balloon which carries advertising for a particular product, company, service, or identifiable artwork, logos, etc. Corporate/Commercial entries are broken down into two categories: national and local. The commercial entry fee is \$3,500.

Room Accommodations

Courtyard by Marriott (330) 494-6494 4375 Metro Circle NW, North Canton, OH 44720

All registered pilots will receive one (1) complimentary room at the Courtyard by Marriott in Canton. The Courtyard is located across the street from the primary launch field. The complimentary room for all pilots will be for Friday afternoon check in (24th) to Sunday morning check out (26th).

Cancellations

June 15th is the last day to cancel a hotel room; **therefore, if we cannot find a pilot to replace you and assume your reservation**, you will be required to pay the full room plus tax.

Crew Rooms / Additional Rooms

To reserve an additional room for crew, family, etc. you must reserve the room(s) in advance through the Courtyard Marriott. Book your reservation by calling the Courtyard Marriott at (330) 494-6494 and specify that you need to book a **Balloon Crew room** for the **Balloon Classic**.

Social Events

Five (5) complimentary tickets will be provided to each pilot for themselves and their crew for:

- Continental breakfast Friday and Saturday morning;
- Dinner on Friday evening at Quaker Steak and Lube after the flight, plus boxed dinners on the launch field for those pilots participating in the night glow;
- Dinner on Saturday evening at the Marriott before the flight briefing; and
- Sunday morning awards reception at the Marriott will feature light snacks and a quick awards presentation allowing all to return home early.

Volunteer Crew

We make every effort to provide local crew should you need such. It is imperative that you indicate on the Pilot Application the number of crew members you would like us to provide for each scheduled flight. If you are provided local crew, we ask that you provide them with the complimentary meal tickets that are given to you.

Maps

Each participating pilot is provided one official full color competition map. Once finalized, a digital version (jpg file) of the competition map will be posted to the Enshrinement Festival's website and available for downloading.

Passengers

Absolutely no paid passenger rides are permitted during the event. We are flying all flights under a standard FAA waiver and it specifically prohibits paid passenger rides. ALL passengers and crew must sign the FAA waiver and have a wristband to have access to the launch field. No exceptions.

Sponsor waiver forms will be handled by event staff but pilots should verify that sponsor passengers have signed the required documents before the flight.

Flight crew are also required to sign the FAA approved Designated Flight Crew form and Release of Liability. These forms will be provided to you at on-site registration. You may turn in a single form containing the signatures of all your crew at the Friday general briefing or propane refueling.

Scheduled Flight Activities

Media Flight, Sponsor and VIP Flights, Friday morning and Friday evening.

These flights are scheduled for Friday morning and Friday evening. There are a limited number of spaces available for the Friday morning media flight and first consideration will be given to special shape and corporate/commercial pilots. All participants receive propane, and accepted participants who are traveling more than 25 miles will receive a complimentary room for Thursday evening.

The Pro Football Hall of Fame Enshrinement Festival sponsors provide an outstanding venue, accommodations, prize funds, and many amenities for participating pilots and crew. For many of our sponsors, the Sponsor Flight is a critical element in their sponsorship package. We also understand that asking pilots to carry a sponsor rider during a competitive flight is not in everyone's best interest. Sponsors are advised that this ride must be taken Friday evening. Self-sponsored corporate pilots are not required to carry Enshrinement Festival sponsors. All pilots will be matched up with their sponsor during the flight briefing at the Marriott. Friday evening is the only time a sponsor rider may receive their ride. If these flights are cancelled for any reason, pilots have no further obligation to provide a sponsor ride. In fact, we ask that you do not provide a ride in this case.

Night Glow, Friday Evening

The Night Glow is planned for 9:00 p.m. Friday evening with space limited to sixteen (16) participants. Priority for Glow participation will be given to corporate/commercial and special shape balloons. If you are interested in participating, please indicate on the Pilot Application Form. This is an extremely well-attended and photographed event and one that corporate and special shape entrants will not want to miss. Pilots accepted for Glow participation receive an additional travel stipend of \$100.

Competitive Flights, Saturday - Sunday

Competitive flights are scheduled for Saturday morning and evening and Sunday morning. Pilots will be flying under standard HACD rules and the Balloonmeister plans to use Watch Me Fly and the Balloon Live App for purposes of PZ monitoring and tasking. Competitors can comply with this requirement using the Balloon Live Sensor or their cell phone or tablet with Wi-Fi or cell connectivity. Task results will be submitted for individual inclusion in the HACD's National Eligibility List. The BFA/HACD covers the cost of tokens for pilots participating in Watch Me Fly for all HACD members.

Pilot Stipends and Awards

All Pilots will be paid a travel stipend for participating in the Balloon Classic. The travel stipend is set forth below:

- Pilots participating Friday to Sunday will receive \$500
- Glow registered pilots receive an additional \$100 travel stipend

Travel stipends will be paid regardless of event weather and are not based on pilots participating in any scheduled flight activity.

Prize money will be provided for the top five competitors as follows:

1st Place	\$1200
2 nd Place	\$ 800
3 rd Place	\$ 500
4 th Place	\$ 300
5 th Place	<u>\$ 200</u>
Total	\$3000

Event Officials

Balloonmeister:	Ben Miller
Fiesta Director:	Erin Bair
Scoring Officer:	Andrew Pestun
Safety Officer:	Rob Wise
Weather Officer:	Alex McCarthy
Volunteer Crew Coordination:	Sally Conley-Oyster (Lindy Anastis)
Landowner Relations:	Greg Groves

Chamber Officials

VP Events & Strategic Initiatives:	Mark Prosis
Event Manager:	Sydney Klein

Application Link: [Watchmefly](#)

Payment Link: [2026 Balloon Classic Pilot Application Entry Fee](#)