

INFLATE YOUR IMAGINATION 2017 MI ALBUQUERQUE BALLOON FIESTA RALLY

The 2017 Monaco International Rally at the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta (AIBF) held October 11th through 15th, 2016 was another outstanding MI Balloon Fiesta Rally.

The Rally had the maximum of 80 coaches (81% were MI members) registered. Seventy-seven were actually in attendance and all observed the Inflation of 600 hot air balloons, including over 90 Special Shapes and 80 flying foreign flags. A few weeks before the rally, there was a Wait List, but it was worked down as the result of late cancellations.

The weather was extremely pleasant during the rally, dipping only into the upper 40s a few mornings. The balloons were able to fly three of the four mornings of the rally and eight of the total nine days of the whole Fiesta. Balloon Glows occurred on all scheduled evenings, although cut short one night due to winds. Following the Glows an enormous and spectacular Fireworks display followed a laser light show. There were a lot of Ooos and Ahas in the MI Social Gathering Area as they were again truly outstanding and we had front row seats!

Monaco again had The Best parking location that could be had at the Balloon Fiesta. We were located in the first five rows of the premier VIP West Parking facility, immediately adjacent to the launch field. We were well less than one hundred yards from the launching balloons and countless balloon flew directly over our coaches at 70 feet, close enough to talk to the pilot and passengers.

We were privileged again to have a hot air balloon pilot talk to the rally group on the first night before and after one of our excellent provided meals. He provided a great history of hot air ballooning and explained the fundamentals of Lighter Than Air flight. He also brought his balloon system, and while he could not inflate the envelope, he set out the basket and partially assembled the system so all could see the instruments. Many took advantage of having their picture taken while standing in the basket and experienced the thrill of operating the powerful, thundering burner.

On Friday, we again recognized the late David Piper, who with his wife Kay hosted the MI Balloon Fiesta Rally for over a decade. To celebrate his legacy, we had shrimp, David's favorite food, at the Social Hour.

Several MI rally participants took the opportunity to crew for a balloon. Several indicated they planned to return next year to crew for the same pilot in hopes of getting a balloon ride. This is common after crewing for a pilot a number of times. At least two of our Rally attendees took balloon rides during the Fiesta.

On Saturday morning, a balloon landed immediately in front of our coaches parked on the front row, providing an opportunity to watch the landing, take down and packing up of a balloon system up close and personal.

At least seventy-five percent of the attendees were first time attendees at AIBF and for a few this was their first MI rally. As with most MI Rallies, there were numerous comments about the copious amounts of food available for rally attendees. Yes, we ate, and ate again. In addition to

the catered BBQ dinner on the first night, we had two exceptional lunches and outstanding Texas size, New Mexico style, breakfast burritos one morning and of course, daily Social Hours with appetizers. The overwhelming response on the Rally Critiques was to return and to return again to El Pinto restaurant for the outstanding luncheon buffet.

We also experienced outstanding volunteerism from the Parking and Greeting Crew to the numerous volunteers who helped prepare daily appetizers and to the photographers who captured the Rally. Many, many thanks to the volunteers who were essential in making the rally a success.

Paul Evert RV Country again came to MI's aid by providing a sponsorship. Be sure to thank Curt Curtis and his staff.

Pictures of the Rally will be posted on the MIRVCLUB.com website under Past Rallies.

If you have not been to the AIBF, it should be high on your Bucket List. MI rally dates for 2018 are October 10th through 14th and you can sign up at MIRVCLUB.COM under Future Rallies. Only MI members can apply now through mid-April. On April 15th, registration will open to all FMCA members on a first-come basis, but non-members must have an MI member as a sponsor. Apply early!

Submitted by Co-Host:

Sandy and Harry Hentschel
De and Marvin Pitts