



Balloon Fiesta® Announces Winners of the 2025 Cindy Petrehn Memorial Photo Contest

Celebrating the beauty of ballooning and honoring a beloved Balloon Fiesta photographer

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: Tom Garrity, media@balloonfiesta.com, 505.898.8689
Stephanie Kitts, skitts@balloonfiesta.com, 505.309.0851

Albuquerque, NM – The ExxonMobil Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta® is proud to announce the winners of the 2025 Cindy Petrehn Memorial Photo Contest. Each year, photographers from around the world are invited to capture the color, creativity, and community spirit that make Balloon Fiesta the most photographed event in the world.

The contest honors the life and legacy of Cindy Petrehn, a licensed hot air balloon pilot, official Balloon Fiesta photographer, and member of both Women in Aviation and The Balloon Federation of America. Cindy was a beloved and integral figure in the ballooning community, capturing the beauty of the skies and the spirit of Balloon Fiesta until her passing in 2013.

The winning photographs were selected from hundreds of entries across seven categories. This year's Grand Prize was awarded to John Roling for his striking photograph capturing one of Balloon Fiesta's special-shaped balloons floating above Albuquerque's morning sky, perfectly framed over a rising moon.

2025 Cindy Petrehn Memorial Photo Contest Winners:

Grand Prize

John Roling

Faces of Fiesta

1st Place – Jerry Johnson

2nd Place – Wendy Hayes

3rd Place – Matthew Sumpter

Mass Ascension

1st Place – Julie Hamlin

2nd Place – Jennifer Johnson

3rd Place – Kasie Cochrane

Dawn Patrol/Balloon Glow

1st Place – John Dominguez

2nd Place – Cooper Hull

3rd Place – Ruthe Grote

Special Shape Rodeo

1st Place – Dan Farley

2nd Place – Howie Pierson

3rd Place – Susan Case

AfterGlow Fireworks

1st Place – Jerry Johnson

2nd Place – Wendy Hayes

3rd Place – Wendy Hayes

Digital or AI Art

1st Place – Neal Halpern



“The Cindy Petrehn Memorial Photo Contest celebrates the artistic vision of our guests who share the story of Balloon Fiesta through their lens,” said Julie Morgas Baca, Balloon Fiesta Executive Director. “We are honored to continue Cindy Petrehn’s legacy of capturing the beauty and emotion that make this event so special.”

The winning photographs are showcased on balloonfiesta.com/photo-contest-2025 and will be shared on the Balloon Fiesta’s official [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#), inviting fans to celebrate and share the creativity of this year’s talented photographers.

###

About Cindy Petrehn

Cindy Petrehn was born in Clinton, Iowa, and grew up surrounded by her sister and nine brothers in Kansas City. Cindy obtained a fine arts degree at Pittsburgh State University and it was there her passion for photography began. To her, photography was “capturing the light in a moment of time and space. We may never pass this way again ... or so the song goes. It is a passion and an obsession.”

In 1978, Cindy moved to Vail, Colorado and spent many years capturing intriguing images of people, events, nature and anything that caught her creative eye. She climbed mountains and traveled the world to find her next great shot.

Cindy was also licensed hot air balloon pilot, the official photographer for the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, and a member of Women in Aviation and The Balloon Federation of America. Cindy was a beloved member and integral part of the Hot Air Ballooning community.

Through her photography, Cindy shared the beauty of the world, ballooning and the open skies with all. Cindy passed away on February 10, 2013 unexpectedly. She has finally found the great adventure she has been searching for and is in the most beautiful hot air balloon, taking the most amazing photographs.

About the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, Inc.

The ExxonMobil Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta® is an annual festival of hot air balloons that takes place every October in Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA. It is the largest gathering of balloons and balloonists in the world. For details on events, schedule, and entertainment, visit our website at balloonfiesta.com and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter/X](#), or [TikTok](#).