

2018 Balloon Fiesta Rally

The 2018 Monaco International Rally at the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta (AIBF) held October 10th through 14th, 2018 was another outstanding MI Balloon Fiesta Rally.

The Rally in essence was sold out with 80 coaches (80% were MI members) registered. Seventy-five were actually in attendance as a result of a number of late cancellations and a few adds the week before. In all, 168 individuals attended the Rally. Of the 57 members who attended, 24 (42%) joined in the past year, 13 for a one year membership, 4 for two years and 7 for three years.

All who attended the Rally observed the Inflation of some 650 hot air balloons, including over 90 Special Shapes and 66 flying foreign flags. The weather was extremely pleasant during the rally, dipping only into the lower 50s in the mornings. The balloons were able to fly three of the four mornings of the rally and seven 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! We were also treated to sky divers in the night skies with pyrotechnics. This was a first for the Fiesta. Quite a site!

Monaco again had The Best parking location that could be had at the Balloon Fiesta. We were located in the first four 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 challenged with significantly reduced parking spaces which did not accommodate 45 footers with tows, but working with the VIP Parking Staff we were able to provide parking spaces for all vehicles. We have been assured that AIBF is working on a solution for next year.

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.

At the luncheon on Thursday, MI President Wilma Jean Alexander provided a brief history of MI at the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta Rally and a tribute to David and Kay Piper, who served as Rally Masters for over a decade. A token appreciation gift of a balloon shaped wine cork holder was presented to Marvin and De Pitts for their eight years of Co-Hosting the MI Balloon Fiesta Rally.

Several MI rally participants took the opportunity to crew for a balloon during the Rally. 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 this year.

On Saturday morning, two balloons landed immediately in front of our coaches parked on the front row, providing an opportunity to watch the landing, and several took the opportunity to help take down and packed up the balloon systems.

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, a continental breakfast another 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. Not enough can be said for the outstanding Advance Crew that assisted this year that included: Kevin Pitts and Elizabeth Mahoney (in De's physical absence), Sharron Riley and Mike Sanders, Betty and Carl Hicks and Roger and Carol Smalley, the latter who have agreed to return in 2019 to be Co-Host. These folks were fabulous! Thanks also to Len and Chris Henderson, MI members who graciously donated their services, equipment and supplies to take and provide photos to all who attended the Thursday luncheon.

RV Country (nee Paul Evert) again came to MI's aid by providing a sponsorship. Be sure to thank Curt Curtis and his staff. And again, Monaco International provided a nice subsidy for MI members again this year, making the Rally an even bigger bargain.

After all bills were paid and bona fide and documented cancellations were refunded, the Rally ended up financially in the black by a couple of thousand.

We have already registered for eighty spaces in 2019 and made the required fifty percent deposit on those spaces. MI rally dates for 2019 are October 9th through 13th, departing mid-morning on the 13th after ballooning activities are over. We hope to have the 2019 budget worked out and the registration on-line by the end of November. As has been the process for the last two years, only MI members can apply 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 who is also attending as a sponsor.

Submitted by Co-Host:

Sandy and Harry Hentschel
De and Marvin Pitts