

## Full of fun: Saratoga Balloon & BBQ Festival has something for everyone

By Paul Post, The Saratogian

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BALLSTON SPA, N.Y. >> A large crowd turned out Friday to kick off the three-day Saratoga Balloon & BBQ festival that continues Saturday and Sunday at the Saratoga County Fairgrounds.

In addition to colorful hot air balloons, the event features a large arts and craft marketplace with more than 100 vendors, live music, and numerous kids games and attractions.

On Friday night, pilots fired up their burners for a balloon glow that lit up the night sky with a dazzling sight spectacle. Weather permitting, flights are scheduled for 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. The marketplace and other activities begin at 10 a.m. both days.

"It's nice to fly here because you have a lot of beautiful country," said balloonist Sylvain Tremblay of Canada. "We've made a lot good friends."

He and fellow pilot Daniel Turcotte help organize the large International Balloon Festival of Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, scheduled for Aug. 11-19.

Ballooning has taken Turcotte to many places including St. Lo, France, near the coast of Normandy where he landed near centuries-old castles.

Tremblay and Turcotte fly a special-shaped balloon called Piko, whose large smiling face delights people of all ages, especially kids.

There's plenty of fun, family entertainment on tap including helicopter rides, a car show and performances by the Jersey Disc Devils, canines who amaze crowds by leaping into the air to catch Frisbees as part of an airborne stunt show.

Andre Bullock, owner of Dre's Place North Carolina Style BBQ, is one of the many food vendors who makes sure no one goes away hungry.

"This vinegar-based barbecue style we use is 125 years old," he said. "It's been passed down through seven generations. My father always told me: Don't fix it, if it ain't broke. So I've been traveling around the country to events like this for the past 13 years."

His menu?

"I do ribs, chicken, baked beans, collard greens, macaroni and cheese, fried okra, beef brisket, sweet potato fries, chopped pork and filet mignon on a stick," Bullock said smiling. "We've been on the Food Network and featured on several other shows."

Pilot Todd Monahan of Lake George is the festival's official balloonmeister, in charge of making sure conditions are safe for flying before anyone leaves the ground. As a young boy, he'd pedal a bike to gaze in amazement as balloons filled with air and lifted skyward at the annual Adirondack Balloon Festival in Glens Falls.

He dreamed of flying some day, and the hobby has now taken him to all parts of the globe.

"I was in Australia with my special shaped balloons, a frog and a lion, two month ago," Monahan said. "I've also flown in New Zealand, Mexico and Canada. In two weeks I'll be at Dutchess County Fairgrounds."

However, Monahan said this weekend's event brings together everything a balloon festival should be.

"By putting the crafts and barbecue together with it, it's like a big party," he said. "You can spend a whole day here. Invite all your friends and have a good time."

For more information, including a full schedule of events, go to: <http://balloonandbbq.com/>.

URL: <http://www.saratogian.com/general-news/20180622/full-of-fun-saratoga-balloon-amp-bbq-festival-has-something-for-everyone>

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