

## **A Short History on The Great Reno Balloon Race**

**By: Melissa Ung**

35 years of tradition continues as The Great Reno Balloon Race (GRBR) soars into Reno for one of northern Nevada's most beloved events.

Founded in 1982, GRBR started as a national ballooning event. It took place between the Nevada State Fair and the Reno Championship Air Races as a way to keep tourists in town during those two events. Now, GRBR is known as the world's largest free hot-air ballooning event, attracting thousands of people from across the globe.

Balloon and pilot participation has also changed significantly throughout the years. "When the balloon race first began, there were only around 20 balloons. Now there are at least 100 balloons," said Marilyn Newtown, a local photographer who has been covering the event since the beginning. "It's amazing to see how much the balloon race has grown these past 35 years. It really is a beautiful experience and tradition."

The growth of this special event has brought with it varying new entertainment elements. Dawn patrol, the glow show, and the tissue paper balloon launch did not exist at its birth.

The iconic Dawn Patrol was introduced in 1985. With only a handful of balloons being authorized to fly in the dark, the balloons light the dark sky with colors and twinkling lights before sunrise. Now a trademark of the event, balloons and their pilots stay and "patrol" the sky until it is light enough for them to see landing sites.

The Glow Show became an addition in 1998 to act as a placeholder between Dawn Patrol and Mass Ascension. Beautiful balloons light up to music while in sync. In 2013, Friday Super Glow Show was included, featuring 20+ balloons lighting up across the field. "It's nice to have some balloons stay on the ground for people to see the light show," said Peggy Stromer, GRBR

Board of Directors. “We started with just two to three balloons, and now it just gets bigger and bigger.”

The E.L. Cord Tissue Paper Balloon Launch is a special addition that started in 1999. A school teacher, who was also a balloon pilot, had originally started this project as a way to teach students how hot-air balloons worked. The project began with 100 students and now, at least 1,500 elementary aged students from Washoe County School District and surrounding areas participate in this event to learn about STEM. With the use of mini-burners, the students are able to launch their colorful, handmade balloons and see their creation lift off.

The Great Reno Balloon Race is a magical event that grows with each passing year. “Every year I love seeing the colors in the sky, different balloons, seeing people interact with one another, and meeting pilots and crews,” said Newtown. “It is a fantastic experience that is never forgotten.”

From the beginning, the event exists because of sponsorship support. Without sponsors, it wouldn't be possible for attendees to experience this event for free. A tradition that GRBR hopes to continue for the coming years.