

Great Forest Park Balloon Race Offered Festival and Hot Air Balloons

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ST. LOUIS - The Great Forest Park Balloon Race included two days of food, music, fireworks and hot air balloons.

On Friday, Sept. 15, visitors stopped by Emerson Central Fields in Forest Park for a festival and balloon glow. The pilots inflated the hot air balloons with fire, which made

the balloons “glow,” and attendees walked around, chatted with the pilots and checked out the balloons up close. Saturday concluded the event with more live music and activities before the big hot air balloon race.

“This free event brings families and friends together for two days of outdoor fun, ‘wow’ moments, new experiences and memories to last a lifetime,” The Great Forest Park Balloon Race organization said. “The Great Forest Park Balloon Race is one of the longest-running hot air balloon races in the country, and one of the few that takes place in a large metropolitan city.”

Emerson Central Fields attendees enjoyed food trucks, inflatables, games and plenty of kids’ activities through St. Louis Children’s Hospital. The [PNC Bank Mobile Learning Adventure](#) exhibit offered information about early childhood education and activities for caregivers and children to do together. DJ Reggie took the Wash U Main Stage at 6 p.m., followed by the balloon glow from 6:45–8:45 p.m.

At 9 p.m., the [U.S. Army Golden Knights Parachute Team](#) put on a show with flares and lights attached to their gear as they fly through the sky. The night ended with a PNC Bank fireworks finale at 9:15 p.m.

The festival resumed at 1 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 16. In addition to the activities and food trucks, visitors enjoyed performances by Washington University’s a cappella groups, the [Pazazz Performers](#) from the [St. Louis Academy of Dance](#), and the [Dragon Drum & Bugle Corps](#). The talented pups of the Purina Pro Plan Performance Team had shows at 1:15 p.m. and 2:30 p.m., and the Golden Knights jumped once again at 3 p.m.



Opening ceremonies started at 3:30 p.m. and the race itself launched at 4:30 p.m. This is a “hare and hound” race, meaning the “hare” balloon will take off first and land somewhere in the Metro East area, then mark the spot with an X. The “hound” balloons followed the hare 15 minutes later, and pilots tried to drop a beanbag as close as possible to the X. Spectators enjoyed the sight, with dozens of hot air balloons in the sky.

The race was presented by PNC Bank. This event began in 1973 and welcomed over 50 hot air balloon pilots to St. Louis this weekend.

“We are proud of the way this annual tradition brings friends and families together to relax outside and create new memories together,” Jessica Stegan, director of Communications and Event Production, said. “Our 2023 planning team has worked with a renewed focus on enhancing the entire festival experience for the thousands who joined us during the weekend.”