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# Press Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**SEPT. 22, 2023**

## **GREAT FOREST PARK BALLOON RACE ANNOUNCES RECORD-SETTING ATTENDANCE, RACE WINNERS FOR 2023 EVENT**

The 2023 Great Forest Park Balloon Race, presented by PNC Bank, welcomed record-setting crowds to Emerson Central Fields in Forest Park Fri., Sept. 15 (The GLOW) and Sat., Sept. 16 (The RACE). The weekend boasted gorgeous weather and brought more than 130,000 spectators together for two days of outdoor fun, “wow” moments, new experiences, and memories to last a lifetime.

“We are so proud to collaborate with our generous sponsors and the City of St. Louis – and to have welcomed such a large and diverse crowd from throughout the entire region and beyond,” said Jessica Stegen, GFPBR director of Communications and Event Production. “Whether it’s a couple on their first date, a group of friends taking a day to just be outside together or grandparents who can’t get enough of the joy the balloons bring to their grandchildren’s faces, the tradition continued in grand fashion throughout the entire weekend.”

Thanks to the support of event sponsors, including presenting sponsor **PNC Bank**, **Washington University in St. Louis** and **Blue Moon Brewing Co.**, this beloved community tradition was free for all to enjoy. *Additional 2023 sponsors included: Purina, St. Louis Children’s Hospital, Martini & Rossi, Miller Lite, Post Holdings, Inc., EO St. Louis, St. Charles Nissan, Hyundai and Genesis, Sydenstricker Nobbe Partners, Ameren Missouri, Carl’s Drive-In, On the Run, Enterprise, Drury Hotels and Raising Canes.*

This year, event organizers worked with a renewed focus on enhancing the entire festival experience for attendees.

New features and enhancements included:

- A new and improved location for the BJC Accessible Viewing Area supported by Starkloff Disability Institute, as well as a new location for ADA parking
- Additional open family picnic space throughout Emerson Central Fields
- The new public Blue Moon Light Sky Lounge & Miller Lite Beer Garden
- Access to a PNC Bank mobile branch
- Expanded WASH U Main Stage presence in a new location on the field, allowing more space to dance and cheer for the pilots as they fired up their burners



## THE WINNERS

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.

Of the 50 balloons onsite for this year's event, 30 took flight during The Race, with another 20 staying tethered to entertain the crowds at Emerson Central Fields. Several caught winds that took them toward Illinois, while a few landed at or near The Hill. Many others ended up launching into very low winds, which allowed them to land in the park and further delight the crowds. And, for the first time in Race history, three balloons were able to land in the same field from which they launched.

The Great Forest Park Balloon Race is a Hare and Hound-style race. The PNC Bank hot air balloon, "Bank on It," is the Hare and leads the pack, getting a head start at launch time and landing first. The other balloons, called Hounds, launch in waves shortly thereafter in pursuit of the Hare balloon. Once the Hare balloon lands, the pilot and crew lay out an "X" on the ground as a target. The pilot who drops his or her bean bag nearest the center of the target is the winner.

### 2023 Race Winners

- 1st Place: Kurt Vitense, flying the Raising Cane's banner - 9 feet 5 inches
- 2nd Place: Walt Rudy, flying the STL MADE banner - 19 feet 2 inches
- 3rd Place: Aaron Gebhart, flying the Purina banner - 32 feet 8.5 inches

## SAVE THE DATE

Mark your calendars now! **The Great Forest Park Balloon Race, presented by PNC Bank, will return to Emerson Central Fields in Forest Park Sept. 20-21, 2024.**

Updates and announcements, answers to frequently asked questions and 2024 sponsorship information can be viewed at [www.greatforestparkballoonrace.com](http://www.greatforestparkballoonrace.com).

### About PNC Bank

*PNC Bank, National Association, is a member of The PNC Financial Services Group, Inc. (NYSE: PNC). PNC is one of the largest diversified financial services institutions in the United States, organized around its customers and communities for strong relationships and local delivery of retail and business banking including a full range of lending products; specialized services for corporations and government entities, including corporate banking, real estate finance and asset-based lending; wealth management and asset management. For information about PNC, visit [www.pnc.com](http://www.pnc.com).*

### About The Great Forest Park Balloon Race

*The Great Forest Park Balloon Race is a two-day event held in St. Louis, Missouri - annually celebrating soft landings and family traditions since 1973. It is the second oldest balloon race in the United States and remains a free event for everyone to enjoy. The Great Forest Park Balloon Race was inducted into the permanent collection of the Library of Congress on May 23, 2000. The induction honors the race as a Local Legacy and documents the race as a "meaningful and significant American community tradition."*

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CELEBRATING SOFT LANDINGS AND FAMILY TRADITIONS SINCE 1973.

**GREATFORESTPARKBALLOONRACE.COM**





## 2023 EVENT PHOTOS

High-res images available upon request.  
Contact Jessica at (314) 518-4283  
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THE GLOW 2023 Photo credit  
Thomas Malkowicz/Wash U



THE RACE 2023  
Photo credit Peter Newcomb



THE RACE 2023  
Photo credit Mary Butkus



GFPBR PNC Bank Fireworks 2023  
Photo credit: STL From Above



THE RACE 2023  
Photo credit Peter Newcomb



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