

THE KIRTLAND AFB NUCLEUS



Photos by Bruce Kendall

A hot air balloon called "Rainbow Ryders" landed near the air traffic control tower Thursday morning. The balloon was immediately met by members of TEAM KIRTLAND who ensured that the scene was secured and the balloonists were safe until their own chase crew could get there.

Balloon Siesta

BY CLOVER HATCHER
Nucleus photojournalist

On Thursday a balloon called "Rainbow Ryders" landed at the air traffic control tower on Kirtland AFB. The pilots were met by eight members of the 377th Security Forces Squadron, Col. George Torres, Lieutenant Colonel Todd Martin, and the volunteer chase crew for Kirtland AFB.

This year members of TEAM KIRTLAND volunteered on chase crews during the International Balloon Fiesta, for the first time. The chase crews' purpose is to meet the balloons that have to land on Kirtland AFB and to be a liaison between balloonists and Security Forces, according to 2nd Lt. Alexander Andrikos, who helped organize the volunteers.

The launch site for the International Balloon Fiesta is approximately 10 miles north of runway 17 of the Albuquerque International Sunport. Balloonists do not land on Kirtland AFB except in emergency situations or due to safety of flight reasons.

Six balloons landed on base Thursday and each time they were greeted by members of the 377th Security Forces Squadron who ensured that security risks and breaches were avoided by securing the landing site. "Security Forces was fantastic. All of the balloonists said that they were very professional and courteous," said 2nd Lt. Grady Patterson, who helped orchestrate the volunteer chase crew that, also, arrived at every landing.

The volunteer chase crew was important because they made sure the balloonists were safe until they could reunite them with their own chase crews. Their truck was stocked with water for the balloonists and they were equipped with the means to obtain medical attention if anyone was hurt, explained Lieutenant Patterson.

2nd Lt. Rhonda Mitchell responded to multiple balloons that morning as one of the volunteers. She helped with the "Rainbow Ryders" balloon, but said it was more fun when one landed near the Maxwell Day Care Center. She said, "The kids loved it. They had a great time jumping on the balloon to help push the air out of it."

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TEAM
KIRTLAND
members are
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