



Bob Waligunda

Biography

Bob can only be classified as a Type A, Adventurer Extraordinaire. The “Curious George” of all things risky and a strong proponent of the motto “Don’t live a life full of regrets.” Bob’s zeal for the most strenuous physical challenges spans many activities other than ballooning, including the piloting of airplanes and ultralights, sky diving, hang gliding, scuba diving, canoe racing and bungee jumping, just to name a few.

But his first love above all else is flying. As a child, Bob was filled with awe with all things that fly. As he gazed into the sky at the airplanes that flew overhead, he imagined that he, too, could pilot his own aircraft one day. And eventually that spirit for adventure, that passion for flight, and that enthusiasm for the ultimate adrenaline rush fueled his desire to learn how to become a pilot.

As a young teenager, Bob focused his attention to aviation by working toward his fixed wings pilots license in the Civil Air Patrol. However, when he saw his first balloon in person while attending college, he started training the next morning with the excitement of a new adventure in flight, with many potential business options. Shortly thereafter, Waligunda founded his own balloon business, Balloon Enterprises, Inc. d/b/a Sky Promotions, headquartered in Springfield, Massachusetts and then Princeton, New Jersey. This would grow to become one of the nation’s largest balloon marketing and management companies with an impressive clientele of national accounts. Sky Promotions would eventually create, design and implement corporate balloon marketing programs for many Fortune 500 companies. Waligunda himself went on to become a pioneer in American ballooning and the originator and producer of many major balloon races throughout the country.

Bob is the co-author of *The Great American Balloon Book*, and has been featured in magazines such as *Life*, *Fortune*, *Popular Science* and *Mechanix Illustrated*. He received special mention in the Congressional Record for his starring role in “The Great American Balloon Adventure,” an Alcoa Hour television documentary, produced by seven-time Emmy award winner Dennis Kane, and filmed by Time Life Films, depicting his continental crossing of the United States - via Hot Air Balloon - from San Francisco to New York. A model of Bob’s well-traveled balloon was displayed in the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC.

In addition, Bob’s balloons have been featured in numerous television commercials, quiz shows, comic strips and movies, including Woody Allen’s “Stardust Memories.” His balloons came in all shapes and sizes, from huge hot air balloons carrying a logo or message (he built the world’s largest hot air balloon at the time for Warner LeRoy and Great Adventure), to helium filled advertising blimps and inflatable replicas of popular consumer products. Bob had four balloons tethered inside of Madison Square Garden in New York in 1979, and the Westinghouse “Flight Bulb” tethered inside of Radio City Music Hall in New York in 1980.

Bob also ran the largest and oldest full service balloon company on the east coast, featuring “Up ‘N Away Airlines” the world’s only “Balloon Airline,” and provided a complete balloon pilot training facility and FAA certified repair station. Bob’s airline had a little something for everyone; for those who hadn’t been anywhere, and would like to go somewhere, and for those who had been everywhere and didn’t care where they would go.



From training flyers to recruiting celebrities to the sport, Bob has been involved in every aspect of ballooning. His efforts to promote ballooning to a professional level were highlighted by starting The International Professional Balloon Pilots Racing Association (IPB), where he was an instructor and FAA designated flight examiner, organizing events to spotlight professionalism. Earlier in his career, he had filed and won a court decision with the State Fire Marshal in 1970 which allowed balloons, previously grounded, to be flown in Massachusetts.

Undoubtedly, Bob's leadership and impressive achievements in the field earned him the titles, according to *Sports Illustrated*, as "the dean of American balloonists" and "the most renowned aerostatic aviator in America."

Bob is a past member of the Board of Directors of the Balloon Federation of America, and Race Committee Chairman of the same. He was a Distributor for Raven Industries and then Aerostar International, at the time the world's oldest and largest balloon manufacturing company, and a member of the Distributor Advisory Board for the same. Presently, Bob is the President of The Great American Balloon Adventure, LLC, a Life Member of the Balloon Federation of America, a member of the National Aeronautic Association (NAA), the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA), the Airplane Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) and the LTA Society (LTA).