

■ NORTH RENO/NORTH VALLEYS

RGT 6/29/08

# Volunteers work hard ahead of balloon races

BY VICTOR CALDERON

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The Great Reno Balloon Race may be a little over two months away but a group of devoted volunteers has been working behind the scenes since last year's event to prepare for the first weekend in September.

Known as the Aeronauts, they are the official volunteer group for the race, which will be Sept. 5-7 at Rancho San Rafael Regional Park.

The largest project for the Aeronauts is supporting the race in areas such as field setup and breakdown, security and pilot crewing.

"It's just a kick helping out with the balloon races," said Shirley Keys, Aeronauts president.

On race days, the Aeronauts arrive at the field as early as 3 a.m. In crewing, it takes five volunteers as few as 10 minutes to get a balloon going in the air, depending on the pilot, said Ed Buzzetti, an Aeronaut since 1991.

When the pilot is ready to come down, the same crew that launched it turns into the chase crew. They have to follow the balloon to wherever it lands and help the pilot do so safely.

SEE AERONAUTS ON 5B



SUBMITTED BY KEN TERRY

Aeronauts pull a balloon envelope out of its bag. From left to right are Larry Erls, Jerry Borton, Tom Stames and Balloon Race pilot Vince Casey. This picture was taken by Ken Terry at last year's Prosser campout, another event Aeronauts volunteer at during the year.



SUBMITTED TO THE RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Aeronauts (in the blue shirts) help children launch their balloons at the 2007 Cord Tissue Paper Balloon Launch during the Great Reno Balloon Race.

# Aeronauts/Group meets each month

From 1B

Buzzetti, a board member for the event, remembers how he got hooked on ballooning.

"I got to take a ride, and I was sold," he said. "It got to be so interesting and exciting that I wanted to do more of it."

Buzzetti has seen the race grow from 20 balloons to more than 100. As a former Aeronaut president, he helped the group become a year-round organization dedicated to furthering ballooning in the

## GET INVOLVED

■ For more information on being an Aeronaut at The Great Reno Balloon Race, visit [www.renoballoon.com/Volunteer](http://www.renoballoon.com/Volunteer) or call 233-9050.

Truckee Meadows. They now meet monthly.

"The biggest thing is getting the ground set up for the safety of the visitors and the pilots," Buzzetti said. "It's hard work but the reward is getting to put on such a great show."