



2012 Louisiana Hot Air Balloon Championship Festival Slated for Sept. 21-23
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GONZALES – The 2012 Louisiana Hot Air Balloon Championship Festival is set to take off on Friday, Sept. 21 at the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center, and conclude with competitive flights on Sunday, Sept. 23, said festival organizers.

The 2012 Louisiana Hot Air Balloon Championship Festival is made up of two events, the hot air balloon competition held Friday through Sunday mornings and the balloon festival held at the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center on Friday and Saturday afternoons into the night. Both events are free and open to the public. Ice chests and pets are not permitted.

“The Louisiana Hot Air Balloon Championship Festival is the perfect festival for all ages, but especially for families with kids,” said Ascension Festival and Cultural Council, Inc. Chairman Brad Walker. “Our goal is to attract people from all over the southern region of the country to Ascension Parish and to our great facility, the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center.”

For the festival portion of the event, Walker said the Lamar-Dixon gates will open at 3 p.m. on Friday and Saturday with free parking provided.

Once festival-goers have parked their vehicles, they may either walk to the festival, which is located on the southwest side of the grounds, or they may take a shuttle

hay wagon at designated pick-up locations. Signs will provide directions to the pick-up areas.

Friday's festival schedule begins with the opening of the children's play area, including bouncers, a rock climbing wall and an arts and crafts area in the large green area at 3 p.m. A \$10 fee will apply for this area. At 4 p.m. Civil Air Patrol will conduct a balloon making demonstration. At 5 p.m. local rocketeers will put on a large rocket launching demonstration followed by the Civil Air Patrol team hosting a racing event at 6 p.m.

Gal Holiday and the Honky Tonk Review Band, a New Orleans-based, national touring act will take to the Budweiser Stage from 6 p.m. until 7:30 p.m.

At 7:30 p.m., balloonists will fire off their propane fuel for the evening's highlight – the balloon glow demonstration.

At 8:30 p.m., New Orleans band The Creole String Beans will play their upbeat swamp pop sounds until the end of the evening's festivities at 10:15 p.m.

Saturday's events kick off with the opening of the children's play area (a \$10 fee) as well as a demonstration by the Civil Air Patrol conducting a mock search and rescue drill at 3 p.m.

Remote control airplane demonstrations will follow at 4 p.m. and powered parachutists will fly around the field beginning at 5 p.m.

Rocket launching demonstrations will begin at 6 p.m., as well as blues slide guitarist and singer, Colin Lake and his band.

When Lake and his band wind down, balloonists will again light up the skies with their balloon glows at 7:30 p.m.

At 8:30 p.m., popular Lafayette band Royal Teeth will kick off their set of indie, rock and pop songs that have been featured on ABC television's crime drama *Body of Proof*, Fox Television's promo for its 2012 line-up and in a national Buick commercial.

At 10 p.m., a stellar fireworks show will light up the sky, signaling the finale of the balloon festival.

Walker said, as of press time, 36 national balloonists have already committed to competing in the balloon flight competition.

Competitive balloonists and their teams will arrive at the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center on Thursday, Sept. 20 and begin registration at 4 a.m. At 5 a.m. teams will inflate their balloons for local television media and a first flight for media will take place at 6:45 a.m.

Walker said competitive flights will take place on Friday, Saturday and Sunday starting at 6:45 a.m. Starting locations will be announced.

Prizes for the Friday competition include a key grab for a new vehicle at the main target location and cash prizes up to \$1,000. Secondary targets have cash prizes up to \$500.

Saturday's main target prize will be a new ATV and trailer, while Sunday's main prize will be two iPads.

"We're hoping for an exceptional turnout," said Walker. "I can't imagine there's going to be any place better than Ascension Parish that weekend."