

## 36th annual Red Rock Balloon Rally to launch from city parks

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent  
Friday, 11 November 2016 11:34

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### Gallup Council OK's launch sites

The Gallup City Council unanimously approved a request by a lead organizer of the 36<sup>th</sup> annual Red Rock Balloon Rally to use city parks, because the Fox Run Golf Course at 1109 Susan Ave. won't be open at the beginning of December. Fox Run is a launch point for the rally, but due to renovations at the troubled course, rally organizers sought out other locations.

The action took place at the Oct. 25 regular city meeting and was not met with opposition. The balloon rally takes place from Dec. 2 through Dec. 4.

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“The Red Rock Balloon Rally wanted to get the city’s permission to use city parks for possible launch sites for the Friday morning mass ascension over town,” Bill Lee, a main organizer and board member of the rally, said after the meeting. “[Superintendent Frank Chiapetti] has also granted us permission to utilize the Gallup-McKinley schools as possible launch sites.”

Lee said the original plan was to use the canyon in the Mossman neighborhood that is at the end of McKee Street. The city owns about seven acres in that area and a private owner had given the rally permission to launch from that location, Lee said.

In past years, that location has served as a practice field of sorts for baseball teams, Lee said. But launching from that locale would have required the removal of a large amount of vegetation.

“This could have created a larger problem with erosion and dust in the area,” Lee explained. “We have been looking at alternatives for about the past four months. We realized that with the time, money, and energy being put into the [Fox Run Golf Course] that it would most likely no longer be an option to launch balloons at the golf course.”

Lee said rally organizers would search for launch sites throughout the city.

“Ultimately, the Red Rock Balloon Rally wants to provide the best possible show over town for visitors and locals,” he said. “This will be a beautiful site with balloons launching from the various locations.”

Lee said balloon rally participants, who come from nearly every state in the U.S. and even from abroad, love to share the sport of ballooning at schools — so students, teachers, and administrators can get a “good show.”

At the council meeting, Mayor Jackie McKinney thanked Lee, who is the executive director of the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce, for taking the time and effort to seek out alternative locations.

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The Red Rock Balloon Rally is one of Gallup's major tourist draws, along with the annual Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial.

Lee, who is an avid balloonist and participates in rallies in Albuquerque and Kayenta, Ariz., has been involved with the local rally since its inception.

The Fox Run Golf Course is undergoing improvements to its greens as well as a re-doing of spotty grass sites, city officials have said. The course is an ideal locale for the ascension, as winds typically carry the balloons north over Gallup, Lee said.

***By Bernie Dotson***  
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