

Festival of Balloons 2010

Interview Opportunities

Interviews are available based upon advance scheduling with Sandy Bell, Festival of Balloons public relations liaison (972-934-2850 x106). More interview opportunities will become available as competitors and delegates register for the convention. For the most up-to-date list of interview opportunities, contact Sandy Bell at 972-934-2850 x106 or sandybell@sbellinc.com.

Overall Festival/Balloon Industry Information

Ted A. & Betty Vlamis

President & Executive Vice-President, Pioneer® Balloon Company, Wichita, KS, USA

Since 1979, Ted A. and Betty Vlamis have guided Pioneer Balloon Company to its position as a global leader in the balloon industry. Pioneer is recognized worldwide as the maker of Qualatex® balloons—"The Very Best Balloons." The company also offers a diversified range of products and business solutions for the professional balloon industry. With their shared vision and entrepreneurial spirit, Ted and Betty have instilled several virtues into Pioneer's philosophy, including unsurpassed quality, employee pride, and a work environment that consists of "51% fun."

Dan Flynn

COO, Pioneer Balloon Company

Dan is the Chief Operating Officer for Pioneer Balloon Company. He has been quite active in balloon industry publicity and public relations issues for the past 15 years. A founder of The Balloon Council, the industry-wide trade information organization, he has served as chairman of the organization since its inception in 1990. He has appeared nationally on ABC News and has been quoted as an industry spokesperson in numerous publications.

Tim Vlamis, CBA*

Managing director of business development, Pioneer Balloon Company

Tim has worked with independent retailers all over the world for more than 25 years. His educational programs in merchandising, marketing, design, store operations, and finance have helped thousands of balloon retailers increase their sales and make more money. In 1996 at the International Balloon Arts Convention, he received the Crystal Award for lifetime achievement in the professional balloon industry for the development of the Qualatex Balloon NetworkSM (QBN®). Tim also earned his Professional Certified Marketer (PCM) designation from the American Marketing Association, a master's degree in business administration from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, and a bachelor's degree in economics from Yale University.

Julie Conner, CBA

Entertainer Support & Event Planning Manager, Pioneer Balloon Company

Julie provides support to the balloon entertainer community in a number of ways. She is the editor of *Balloon Magic®—The Magazine*, a quarterly publication for balloon twisters that features step-by-step figure instructions, balloon artist spotlight stories, business advice, and more. She also develops relationships in the entertainer community by attending industry events, as well as sponsoring instructors and providing sample product and other support for events. Julie has also been an instrumental player in the planning of the World Balloon Convention 2010, host of the Festival of Balloons.

Balloon Artists (Listed alphabetically)

Pat Billups, CBA

Lone Star Balloon in Grand Prairie, TX, USA

Pat has been in the balloon industry since 1990, and her expertise covers many areas. She ran a successful decorating business for many years until 1995 when she opened a wholesale balloon warehouse. In 2006, she returned to college and soon after became a representative for several distributors. Her educational background includes a Certified Public Accountant certificate, and a master's degree in marketing research. Pat is passionate about the balloon industry and feels fulfillment when she can help other businesses achieve success. By teaching classes on pricing and business planning, she hopes to provide motivation and equip business owners with the skills they need to increase their profits and operate their businesses more efficiently.

Robbie Furman, CBA

Balloons by Robbie in Fairfield, NJ, USA

Robbie has been working with balloons for nearly 20 years. He got his start as a volunteer at non-profit events and, after several years, became a full-time volunteer. As a result of these experiences, he got the chance to work extensively with balloons and began specializing in decorating. In 2002, Balloons by Robbie was born. Robbie's professionalism and unique style has allowed him to decorate countless events over the last several years. His balloon work has been featured on ABC's "All My Children," "Live with Regis and Kelly," and most recently, "Ugly Betty." Robbie has a passion for teaching his craft to others, and has been an instructor at several events in the U.S. and abroad. He has also produced a collection of educational DVDs, as well as attended and competed at a number of industry events and won several awards.

Larry Moss, CBA

Airigami.com and BalloonHQ in Rochester, NY, USA

When it comes to creating masterpieces, Vincent Van Gogh used paint, Austin Rodin used bronze, and Larry Moss uses balloons. Calling his art form "airigami," Larry has displayed his balloon work all over the world. His achievements have been recognized by such notable publications as the Associated Press, CNN, "Smithsonian Magazine," and the Wall Street Journal, among others. He has also performed at the White House and appeared on "The Martha Stewart Show" and NBC's "Today." Larry is world-renowned for his "full-blown" installations, which enchant both young and old. His accomplishments include setting the world record for the largest Non-round balloon sculpture, and building the world's first piloted balloon sculpture. He's also the creator and publisher of four Balloon Manors—10,000 square-foot haunted houses made from 100,000 balloons.

Jodie Norris, CBA

Balloon Art Studio in Essex, United Kingdom

Jodie is a university-qualified lecturer in both balloon artistry and floristry. She's worked relentlessly for many years to help educate people in the industry, spending time teaching, managing retail outlets, and running a successful home-based business. Known for her award-winning Non-round balloon sculptures, Jodie offers knowledge in both Round and Non-round balloons. Her skills and experience can be seen in her many competition pieces, for which she's won first place awards at numerous industry events. Jodie has also won Decorator of the Year, Designer of the Year, and Best Training Provider at the many events she's attended. Jodie works alongside Dee White, CBA, with whom she runs a successful event decorating company. The pair also teaches for Pioneer Balloon Company, and is part of the Conwin design team.

George Quintero, CBA

Balloon Haven, Chino, CA, USA

George Quintero and his partner, Peter Lacagno, have operated Balloon Haven—a successful balloon business in Chino, CA, USA—for more than 26 years. Along with their staff of more than 15 part-time and full-time employees, they provide decor and various other balloon-related services to numerous schools, hotels, businesses, and large corporations throughout Southern California and the U.S. They've worked with such high-profile clients as Disney and Universal Studios, and some of their most recent engagements include decor for the premieres of Disney's "High School Musical" and Disney/Pixar's "Up."

Jim Skistimas, CBA

Balloon House Design Studios in Flower Mound, TX, USA

Jim is an accomplished artist with nearly 20 years experience in advertising illustration and the special events industry. He earned his bachelor's degree in art education from the University of Oklahoma, and has been the decor and event designer at his business, Balloon House Design Studios, since 1990. Jim has shared his expertise as an instructor all over the U.S., as well as in Japan, Brazil, and Australia. He also developed and patented the Skistimas Design System (SDS) grid format system for pixel balloon walls and murals—a groundbreaking concept in the balloon decorating industry. He and his wife, Pat, are the four-time recipients of IBAC's Designer of the Year Award—making them the only designers to be awarded this designation more than twice. Jim has also designed more than 125 floats and specialty units for parades in the U.S., and has worked with such notable clients as Frito-Lay, American Airlines, the Dallas Cowboys, and Radio Shack.

Rocky Toomey, CBA

Future Affairs Productions in East Providence, RI, USA

For more than 25 years, Rocky Toomey has designed incredible themed settings in venues around the world. With a talent for manipulating special effects, Rocky's designs focus on allowing guests to be a part of the experience. Rocky got his start in the balloon industry when he moved to Hawaii and opened the first balloon company in the state. As a pioneer in the balloon decorating industry, Rocky also helped establish the International Balloon Arts Convention (IBAC) and the Festival of Balloons, which invited the general public to view large-scale balloon sculptures. As vice president of Future Affairs Productions, he's used his talents for the past nine years to produce stellar designs. His work has earned him many industry awards, including the prestigious Special Event Magazine Gala Award in 1989, 1999, and 2009, and the IBAC Crystal Award.

* Certified Balloon ArtistSM