



DOWNWIND CHASE

Official Newsletter of the Pacific Coast Aeronauts

♦ JULY 2026 ♦

Ballooning Evolution, the Goodness Still Out There

There was a time when farm fields were easy to find, landowners waved hello instead of calling lawyers, and a big colorful bag of air was nothing short of magical to anyone who saw it.

When I first got involved in ballooning here in California, we'd commonly have half a dozen balloons flying south of San Jose on any good weather weekend. The novelty made the news. People felt a genuine sense of wonder when they saw us. We were a sport. We were part of the community.

As the decades marched on, the suburbs overtook the farmland, GA airports got busier, and the cost of balloons, chase trucks, and fuel made it harder to bring new people into the fold. The ride business evolved into something entirely its own — those enormous 20-person commercial balloons with corporate backing — while sport ballooning took its own path. Change isn't always comfortable, but it's a sign of life and movement.



Weather has thrown some curveballs too. Rainy decades pushed WHAMOBASS from November to October. Droughts made landowners nervous about dry fields. And lately, the wind has been something else entirely. Even social media — which should be our greatest showcase — has had a habit of turning every tipped basket into a headline. It can make the beauty a little hard to find sometimes.

But here's the thing: the wonder is still there. It's in every curious neighbor who peeks over the fence. It's in the coffee shop conversations with potential new crew who are absolutely amazed at how approachable an AX7 setup is. It's in the

View from the Board April Turner President & Co- Secretary

IMPORTANT INFO!

CLUB MEETINGS

VIA ZOOM, HELD ON THE FIRST
WEDNESDAY OF ODD-NUMBERED
MONTHS PLUS DECEMBER

2ND MEETING

OF 2026

Wed. July 1

@ 7PM PDT

ZOOM BOARD MEETING

NEXT ONE IS:

Thurs July 16 @ 7PM

CHECK EMAIL 4 LINK

IN THIS ISSUE...

From the Board— April Turner	1-2
Frederick in Flight	2
Backyard landing—Brent Rolland	3-4
Club Officers & Committees	5

Continued next page

folks who are curious to see a balloon inflated in the back pasture — nerves and all — because they've never seen anything like it. That curiosity isn't entirely gone. We just have to meet it. And that's exactly what the **balloon camps and junior balloonist programs** are doing — and doing brilliantly.

This year's camps are proof that the next generation of pilots and crew is out there, eager and ready. The 2026 Southeastern Balloon Camp in Cordele, Georgia (June 22–28) filled up completely, and the High Sierra Balloon Camp is currently underway in Reno, Nevada (June 23–28). These aren't passive spectators — campers are participating in real balloon flights and tethered operations, and more than 20 of them earned FAA student pilot certificates before leaving camp last year alone.

The numbers behind these programs are genuinely inspiring. At a recent Southeastern camp, over 40 volunteers — including 13 commercial pilots — showed up to spend a week of their summer giving campers one-on-one time in the air, logging over 100 hours of flight instruction in a single week. At the High Sierra camp, nine balloons filled the sky on a single day, and every camper got airborne. Campers here get to experience the only aircraft carrier made for balloons in Lake Tahoe. Since 2014, more than 37 camp alumni have gone on to become pilots themselves.

This is the story we get to tell. Whether you're still flying regularly or your balloon has been in the bag for a while, you have a role to play: share these camps on your socials, talk them up to anyone who's ever smiled at your flying stories. Every post is a little press release for our sport. Every share reaches someone who didn't know this world existed.

Be the press secretary. The sky is still magic — let's make sure people know it.

Follow along with the camps live:

[Balloon Federation of America Youth Program Facebook](#)

[Southeastern Balloon Camp Facebook Event](#)

[High Sierra Balloon Camp Facebook Event](#)



Frederick in Flight!

We spent a great weekend in Colorado. Unfortunately we only flew one flight, but inflated the other two days and had a candlestick at the Evening Glow with a live band, food trucks, booths and bubbles with big crowds.!

Soft landings, Jeanne
Photos from City of Frederick Facebook page.



Fifteen Minutes of Fame

By Brent Roland

By now, most of the planet seems to have seen the videos ... and the number of people that have contacted me to say they watched at least one of them has been ... well ... a bit embarrassing!

If you're one of the few that missed the fun, check out:

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/ZT5Tdg3K2wg>

https://www.youtube.com/shorts/Sfwse_26Dqg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9N5cEplf7g>



Now that I've had my "chat" with the FAA (spoiler alert – I came away unscathed) I think it's safe to tell the story and maybe even learn a thing or two as well.

Let's start with – name a pilot that hasn't landed on a street, in a cul-de-sac, or someone's front (or back) lawn. As we used to say in the motorcycling world, "there are those who have ... and those who will".

This started out as a bit of a special flight – my soon-to-be 90-year-old mother-in-law was in town, and although I'd taken her up at least twice before, she was looking forward to a ride in Temecula over the vineyards. As it happened, her cousin from Ohio was also coming to town and was interested in joining us. Since I already had committed to a commercial flight that day, I arranged for them to join the party.

I was assigned to fly a 210 cu ft system carrying 90 gallons of fuel and 13 passengers. I've flown the same balloon many times before and know that I average 4 – 5 gallons of fuel per passenger-hour – so with 13 passengers, that works out to a flight duration between 1.4 – 1.7 hours maximum flight time (I use a separate inflation tank to get buoyant).

There was a somewhat light-and-variable wind, and around 45 minutes into the flight, I was on track for one of the open vineyard properties and started my descent. Between 1000' and 300' AGL ... we hit a 10 mph wind that took us off the target and towards town. Sigh. No big deal – there are several open spots that we've been before – schools, churches, even a park as a last resort.

Do you think any of those ended up anywhere along my flight path? Of course not! Below 300', it was light-and-variable again. Even worse, that strong wind layer I had on the

Continued on next page

way down? Gone. All the way up to 3000' AGL ... everything was 1 – 2 mph or dead calm.

So ... on we flew. I stayed low so that I could take quick advantage of any viable options – streets, cul-de-sacs, parks ... each time I thought I had one, wind shift. Ultimately, we were inching along between 2 streets / rows of houses and we were now almost 1.5 hours into the flight. While there was a street ahead at the end of the block of houses, we weren't getting there very fast.

Beneath us were several back yards – most had trees or shrubs and not much open space – except for one that was just ahead of us. I decided that it was far better to take the open space while I still had fuel and could do so in a controlled landing than to keep flying and potentially end up in a forced landing on someone's house or tree. I used the rotation vents to align the basket with the yard – vented – and landed. One little hop (you can see in one of the videos) and we were settled!

My wife, who had been following on the ground, immediately sent me a text exclaiming “OMG You've killed my mother!”

The homeowners were alerted by neighbors and came out to see what was happening – and what a great pair they turned out to be! Hunter and Jenna were thrilled by the early morning surprise – and very gracious in allowing access to the crew to walk me out to the street.

As it turns out, this turned out to be quite the event for the entire neighborhood. The homeowners said that they'd only been in their house for a couple of years and had been meaning to host some kind of BBQ / block party to meet the neighbors – but it hadn't happened yet. This event brought out all the neighbors – and they all shared a common adventure.

As you can see in the videos – I had the passengers exit the basket and walk to the street. I had the crew bring me 3 fuel tanks – more for ballast than anything else – but also “just in case”. Had I broken free of the drop lines and needed to fly on, I wanted to have plenty of options! We used 2 droplines and 6 crew – I climbed to around 40' to clear trees and rooftops – and the crew walked me out to the street on the droplines where we deflated.

The passengers had the time of their lives – no one was injured – no property was damaged – and they all have stories to tell. Hunter (afraid of heights ...) and Jenna came out a few weeks later with Hunter's parents for a flight on Mother's Day. They, along with one of the other couples had their 15 minutes of fame as well.

Now – let's talk about lessons learned for a bit. My interaction with the FAA Safety Inspector were extremely positive and cordial. Obviously, they wanted to check my certificate, currency, flight review, medical – but they were also very interested in processes used by the operation – the Safety Management System (look that one up in your FARs), training, fuel calculations, weather conditions, and passenger weight. After talking through many of the flight details I was told that it looked like a perfectly normal flight, typical wind conditions, and simply an unusual location for the landing. He asked if there was anything I had learned / would do differently and I told him:

From a flight duration / landing perspective, we've all been there at some point, but I could have gone for a rapid descent through the fast layer and perhaps been able to stay on the original target area – but we'll never know for sure.

If there's a “next time” – I'm confiscating the video!



PACIFIC COAST AERONAUTS CLUB CONTACTS

2026 PCA BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND CLUB OFFICERS

Names & Email Addresses	Board Term Expires at End of Year	2026 Officers
Patrick Moore pcamoore587@gmail.com	2026	Chair of BOD
April Turner pca.april@gmail.com	2026	President & Co-Secretary
Dave Wakefield pca.dwake@gmail.com	Volunteer	Vice President
Linda Walton pca.lindaw@gmail.com	2026	Treasurer
Jeanne Anson ansonlta2@gmail.com	2027	Co-Secretary
Tom Sharpee tomsharpee@gmail.com	2027	Member

2026 PCA COMMITTEES

Committee	Chairperson	Members
Newsletter	Jeanne Anson	<i>And All Members!</i>
Membership Dev. Outreach	TBD	TBD
Membership Dev. Communications	Dave Wakefield	TBD
Education & Training	Pat Moore April Turner	Jeanne Anson Tom Sharpee
Calendar Based Events	Not Committees	Start Dates
BFA Youth Program	Jeanne Anson	On Going
Awards	Linda W & April	Later in the year
WHAMOBASS	Board	Planning starts 3/26
Christmas Party	Jana Couch	Oct 2026 planning starts



DISCLAIMER: The PCA is a non-profit incorporated organization. Information contained within this issue of the *DOWNWIND CHASE* is the most up-to-date and correct information available at the time of publication. The PCA, its Officers and Directors are not responsible for the accuracy of the material enclosed herein. Opinions expressed in the *DOWNWIND CHASE* are solely those of the individual authors and should not be perceived to be those of the PCA, the Editor, Publisher, or its leadership.

FOR SALE

Balloon and Equipment

Right-click on picture captions for more details



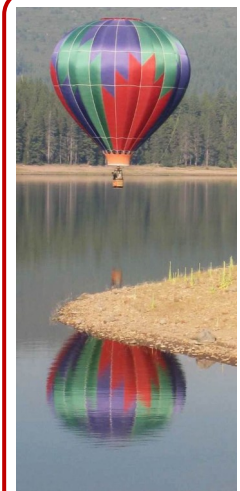
Raven S-55A



2001 Cameron 'Shoe 90



TBW AX-8B—Racer



Aerostar S49A