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Jonathan Trappe takes 50-mile balloon ride...in his office chair

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Sitting in his office chair, it can be said that Jonathan Trappe, Level C-Outsourcing, sometimes has his head in the clouds—literally. Having attached his chair to 55 helium-filled balloons, Jonathan ascended approximately 15,000 feet (4,550 meters) and flew nearly 50 miles over eastern North Carolina on June 7, 2008.

While the chair is back in place at Accenture's Raleigh, North Carolina office where Jonathan works as technical projects manager for a Public Service client, it will never quite feel the same.

"The chair represents work, the things we must do, the obligations we have," says Jonathan, a licensed balloon pilot. "The balloons represent fantasy, dreams, the uncommon, the unusual, the unlikely, the impossible but true."

He adds, "I thought it would be wonderful to fly my chair, and then I would have my gondola with me every day at work and be able to remember this flight each time I come in for a day at the office."

Jonathan believed that using his chair would be a great way to mingle a hobby with his work life, as many of his Accenture colleagues served as his ground crew that day.



Ballooning brings awareness

The simple act of riding the wind in an open-air cockpit entices Jonathan to push himself to new heights, but it is far from a solitary endeavor.

"You need a team to help you set up and fly, and somebody on the ground always has to chase you or you end up walking home," Jonathan explained. "Ballooning also involves your community because from above you become very aware of things going on down below. You start to connect to the topography, you see the development that's occurring and witness the agricultural cycles. It's a great way to become connected to wherever you fly."

Jonathan notes the distinction among the different types of balloons. Hot-air balloons typically fly about an hour and have limited range and altitude, while gas balloons (helium or hydrogen filled)—his preferred method of ballooning—can fly hundreds or even thousands of miles over the course of a 10 to 60 hour flight.

"I believe there is near universal magic in a cluster balloon flight," Jonathan says. "In children's eyes, a cluster balloon launch embodies all the magic that is in the world. In an adult's eyes, seeing a cluster flight stirs a dream that so many of us once had but has grown quiet."

Jonathan says hot-air ballooning is something anyone can do safely with the appropriate training, noting his certification from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

If you are interested in flying, "All you have to do is open your phone book to 'Balloons' and find a commercial hot-air balloon operator in your area," Jonathan says. "This should be a licensed commercial pilot flying an FAA-certified balloon."

Jonathan adds that proper preparation is key to an enjoyable ballooning experience, noting his Accenture role in this respect: "It is the detailed organization and project skills that I've built at Accenture that help me prepare and launch a safe, legal flight."

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