Staff photo by Julie Turkewitz

Jonathan Trappe, 35, of Raleigh, spent the last year engineering a way to carry himself up thousands of feet in the air by strapping balloons to his office chair. On Saturday, his crew gathered before sunrise to prepare for his 6 a.m. launch.

Trappe, right, listens to his girlfriend Nidia Ruiz Ramirez as she goes through a pre-flight checklist. Besides a parachute and other safety items, Trappe packed a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for the four-hour flight.

Staff photo by Julie Turkewitz

Troy Bradley, left, dishes out flight tips before takeoff. Trappe, center, listens along with John Baynon, back, and Susan Brothers, right. More than a dozen friends, colleagues and balloon enthusiasts woke before dawn to serve as Trappe's crew.

Staff photo by Julie Turkewitz

Trappe and Ramirez pause between preparations, despite fear that Trappe would miss his 6 a.m. takeoff time. "Anytime I see him take a passion in something, I just have to support him," Ramirez said. Baynon, left, does a last minute strap check while Brothers looks on.
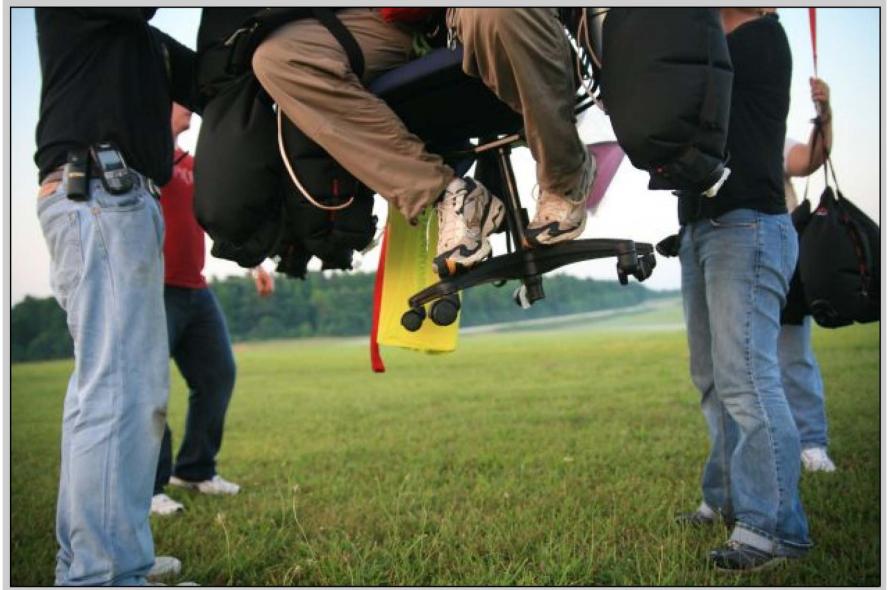
Jonathan Trappe, center in white, gathers with his crew before taking off.

Staff photo by Julie Turkewitz

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With 55 balloons strapped to Trappe's office chair - each about 8 feet tall - he expected to rise 300-400 feet per minute...

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The crew carries Trappe and his chair to the liftoff spot. "It's not mine, you know," Trappe said of the office chair used during his flight. The seat was taken from his office at Accenture, where he works as a technical projects manager.

Staff photo by Julie Turkewitz

Trappe's crew watches as his office chair aircraft fades into the distance as the sun rises. After reaching a maximum height of more than 14,000 feet, Trappe landed more than 50 miles from his liftoff spot. "Over two miles off the ground!" he said after landing. "It's wonderful to achieve this dream. It's a little scary, too."