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**Presentation of Funds raised at 2017 St. Patrick’s Day Balloon Ralley to Friends of Smokey Bear Balloon**

**6:30 AM on Tuesday July 11, 2017 at the Albuquerque Balloon Museum**

The international ballooning community lost a great pilot and a great friend when William “Bill” Chapel, pilot of **“Smokey Bear Balloon”** and founder of **“Friends of Smokey Bear Balloon”** nonprofit educational foundation, passed away in February 2017 after a valiant struggle with brain cancer.

Bill used the past several decades of his life to fly ”Smokey Bear Balloon” in rallies worldwide as a means of education people against the dangers of wild fires. He founded “Friends of Smokey Bear Balloon” nonprofit educational organization to support the costs of the balloon and education materials and worked solely on donations and sales of Smokey Bear Balloon memorabilia.

In March of 2017 the Valencia Flying & Retrieval Society (VFRS), host of the annual St. Patrick’s Day Balloon Rallye in Belen NM, selected **“Friends of Smokey Bear Balloon”** as their charity for the rallye, and conducted a silent auction of donated items during the pre-rallye Pilot, Crew & Sponsor Check In & Dinner at the Hub City Brewery, located next to the Belen Rail Runner Station. The assembled balloonists, crews, and sponsors were very generous in their auction offers, and the VFRS raised $1000.00 for Friends of Smokey Bear.

Because Smokey has had a very busy flight schedule this year it’s been difficult to arrange a meeting time during which to make the official presentation of the $1000.00 check to Alan Wynn, “Smokey’s” current pilot. Arrangements have finally been made.

Smokey will be appear at the **2nd Annual Balloon Federation of America Rio Grande Balloon Youth Camp** during July and the presentation of the check will be made at **6:30AM, Tuesday July 11th, at the Albuquerque Balloon Museum.**

All interested parties are invited to attend.

For questions and comments, please contact **Kelli Ballengee, VFRS Balloonmeister, and coordinator of the Rio Grande Balloon Youth Camp, via email at:** [**mkellib@aol.com**](mailto:mkellib@aol.com) **or by phone/text at: 505-559-3691**

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