



## Central Texas Ballooning Association – Gas Division Newsletter

Volume 1, Number 2 - July 2003

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### **Letters to the Editor**

This is real feedback from real people:

“Damn good first effort...excellent...”

“Thanks for including me on your newsletter mailing. Will attempt a second reading as you requested”

“A very entertaining read! Keep up the good work.”

“Awesome newsletter! Can't wait for the next issue.”

“Greg you bungus.” (I think that's a compliment.)

“Oh Greg, You should not have shown the world my baby fat teenage picture.”

Except for that last one (the sender shall remain anonymous), it looks like we're off to a good start!

### **Awards Banquet**

The Central Texas Ballooning Association – Gas Division held its second annual awards banquet on February 16. It was a no holds barred/take no prisoners kind of evening. Here is a report from one

of the survivors.

It's kind of interesting holding an awards banquet for something we never do in Central Texas. Not only do we not have a championship series, we didn't even have a championship event. In fact, the CTBA – GD pilots only registered three flights for the entire year and none of those were even in central Texas.

The irony of it all is the only person we know of who has actually landed a gas balloon in central Texas is our instructor Willie Eimers. During the 1999 Gordon Bennett, he and co-pilot Berndt Landsmann dropped in just up the road from here in Fredericksburg.

In spite of that fact that we don't do gas around these parts and most of our friends in the CTBA have never seen a gas balloon, we were determined to have an evening of fun and recognize both pilots and supporters for their efforts.

In addition to the hometown crowd, the Houston Chapter of the CTBA- GD was represented by no less than 6 members. Looking at the expressions on their faces, it's hard to say if they were shocked or amazed (or both) as the evening unfolded. Sam Edwards (and his lovely bride Jean) were so moved by the evening, they decided right then and there to leave Houston and move to Austin.

Between the first sip of wine and the last bite of tiramisu, we recognized several people for their outstanding contributions to gas ballooning in Central Texas. President's Awards were presented to:

Jim Rice – Certificate of Appreciation  
Jean MacNutt – Certificate of Special Appreciation  
Bonnie McBride – Crew person of the year  
Skinny T – Royal Order of the Scoop



Skinny receiving the Royal Order of the Scoop, for his many contributions to gas ballooning in Central Texas. Sam Edwards (left) looks on, dreaming of the day he will be the equal of Skinny. Dave Murphy – unimpressed - fights for the last cannoli.

With no CTBA – GD championship event this year, we looked to America’s Challenge to determine this year’s placings. Biggest loser went to Greg Winker who received the prize for third place. Tied for second were CTBA – GD team members Phillip MacNutt and Brian Critelli. And this years first place prize went to the Blonde Bombshell – Cheri White. An interesting fact about her flight - it was the 15th longest distance flight in a gas balloon ever made. It was also the 25th longest duration gas balloon flight ever. That puts Cheri (and some guy we’ve never heard of named Mark Sullivan) in pretty rare company. Our pope hats are off to them for a truly impressive flight.



The CTBA - GD pilots with their trophies (which look suspiciously like bumper stickers slapped on cheesy pieces of PVC pipe).

The banquet was a tremendous success and whether or not we fly during 2003, you can be sure to find us celebrating the events of 2003 next February.

### **Presidents Column**

If the Universe is closed, then that means the fluctuation that started it all was so large in mass-energy that it caused the local space-time to become so curved that it became a closed, self-contained geometry. That means there is no way to ever find out what is on the 'outside' of the universe, since we are on the 'inside' of a curved metric. Think of it like this – you are on a boat. You can't fly, you can't swim. You can't look up, you can't look down. How would you describe what things are like above or below the surface? We're just like ants on a balloon that's being inflated, according to Hubble et al. You might ask what's to stop another universe from spontaneously appearing somewhere else in the Nothing and containing such oddities as Apollo Creed winning and Rocky Balboa losing. The answer is nothing.

Skinny and Greg had a discussion along these lines regarding the very “iffy” weather conditions present at the Dayton gas race.

Skinny: “That weather briefing was just like the Heisenberg uncertainty principle.”

Greg: “What’s that?”

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Skinny: “I’m very uncertain”

That’s all I’ve got to say.

Phillip

Note: the part about the universe and all was from my friend Dave Hoadley, the smartest guy I’ve ever met. All I did was write down the conversation between Skinny and Greg.

### **Our First Honorary Member**

Richard Abruzzo recently completed a solo transcontinental flight. Due to the significance of the flight (i.e. he had the good sense to fly right over our home town of Austin, Texas) we made a special presentation to Richard at our annual awards banquet. Richard received a certificate (suitable for framing) that reads as follows:

Whereas

Richard Abruzzo

A gas balloon pilot of some distinction,  
In recognition of your solo transcontinental gas balloon flight,  
An achievement 220 years in the making,  
Is considered by us,  
To be among the most impressive gas balloon flights of all time  
(we’re thinking top 100),  
Do hereby confer on you honorary membership in the  
Central Texas Ballooning Association – Gas Division

But only for the month of March 2003.

And that’s only when you wear the pope hat.



Rico and dad celebrating their honorary membership in the CTBA – GD.

### Gas Balloon Post

Ever since Don Kersten and Bill Grabb sent me a postcard from the Highalpine Balloonweeks in 1972, I've collected balloon mail. Richard prepared a small batch of covers for his flight and I was fortunate to receive one.



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The covers are standard No. 10 size and are postmarked Waverly, GA Feb. 6, 2003. Fifty covers were prepared and flown. Unfortunately, they are all spoken for.

If you carry balloon mail on your gas flights, be sure to submit a cover for future publication.

### **Coming Events**

CTBA – GD Mid-Year Meeting. We'll be getting together at Gingerman the evening of July 17<sup>th</sup> to reminisce about all our gas flights from the last six months (that would be one). Phillip says we have to try all 85 beers they have on tap so plan your evening accordingly. We will also be flipping a coin to select officers for next year. Greg found a 2000 Gordon Bennett medal in an old shoebox that we'll use for the toss. Admission fee is 100 cubic feet of helium.

America's Challenge - October 2003 in Albuquerque - If they have it, we will come. Always a tremendous event, so we wouldn't dream of missing it. Invitations are out. Register before it's too late. The CTBA-GD will be there in full force. Look for the goofy pope hats.

Wurstfest – November in New Braunfelds. The first CTBA – GD outing will take us to a Texas sized Oktoberfest celebration. Good food, good music, good beer, good weather and good friends make for a perfect day. We've been going for years but this will be the first time we'll bring the pope heads with us.

Charles Day Party - December 1, 2003 - Somewhere in Austin. We gather to pay tribute to our patron, Jacques Alexandre Cesar Charles, who made all this possible 220 years ago. We'll be screening Monty Python's "The Golden Age of Ballooning." More details to follow as we approach this glorious day.

### **Gasballoning uber Deutschland**

Phillip is the luckiest man alive (at least this month.) Business took him to Europe and took the opportunity to visit our mentor Willie Eimers and go for a flight. Here is his report.

Ok! Alright!

While in Europe in April, I decided to drop by and visit the Eimers family in Duisberg. All are doing well, including Einstein, the gas mascot dog. I just found out that Einstein is a "Jack Russell Terrier". This is the coolest type of dog on the planet. Willie, being the gentleman that he is, had the balloon loaded up and ready to go for short fun flight. We launched northeast of Dusseldorf at about 6:30 am. It is interesting to note that we arrived at the launch site at about 5:30. There were three of us, Willie, me, and Karl Werner Becker. Three people completely inflated and rigged a gas balloon, including filling all the sand bags, in less than one hour.

Being just Willie and me, we chose to take the 500 meter balloon, known to Willie as "the 500 cubics". Slow winds early on forced us to hover over Duisberg/Dusseldorf area which is very heavy in industry and smoke stacks and stuff like that. But I got to see all the details of how a steel mill

operates from above. Having enough of the smoke, I pitched a couple of bags; we climbed a bit, and headed off toward the southwest. Even though the day was very cold (hovering around freezing), the thermal activity came on with a vengeance around 10 am. We cycled through this ground-to-5,000-foot-back-to-ground thing about 4 or 5 times, losing sand each time.

Passing through The Netherlands and on into Belgium, it was clear we would not last much longer, since we started with only 22 bags. We peaked out at about 6,000 feet on our last cycle, where it started snowing in the basket. We both wished we had worn moon boots or Wiggies. I took the balloon down, overvalved (forgetting how the parachute feels significantly different when light), and promptly put us into the tree tops. Willie gave me a “zero” for this little maneuver. We kind of just sat there for a few minutes with the basket about 15 feet below the tree tops. Finally we hauled the trail rope back in, popped up, and landed in the next field with a “less than desirable” amount of sand on board. Our landing site was just east of the Brussels area, which is very difficult to fly through, so I was happy to get down. Karl Werner was nearby. We packed up, ate lunch, and stopped by the car dealer where Willie is buying his new van. We just happened to land within a few miles of it. Flight time was about 9 hours, and we covered maybe 180 kilometers. The best part of the whole stay was that I got to sleep in the “Gordon Bennett Bar” down in Willie’s basement. This is a shrine that should be listed as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Also, I picked up a copy of the new gas manual that Astrid, Walter Müller and Gerhard Hurck have written, and I must say it is substantial and excellent. If you don’t have one, you need to get one.



The Eimers family gets into the spirit!

After leaving, I went and stayed a few days with Dave and Jessica Bair in Dublin. These are some great folks, putting up with all my monkey business, and taking me out to the pubs in the city. I

learned quickly that Gaelic is completely impossible to understand. From there, 5 days in Edinburgh Scotland, which is now one of my very favorite cities in Europe. I strongly recommend a visit there to all. They have castles, and underground haunted vaults, and “haggis” and kilts, and all that good stuff. I bought a set of bagpipes. No doubt that my neighbors will soon be regretting this new acquisition.

Gluck Ab,  
Phillip

### And Now for Something Completely Different (also known as “My Life in Central Texas”)



Show your support. Impress your friends. Be a gas balloon snob. Now available for a limited time - the official CTBA – Gas Division Bumper Sticker. Tastefully done in black on white, they are at home on anything from your trailer to your tuxedo. They were a big hit at the awards banquet, appearing on anything from the first place trophy to my rear end. For only \$2 (postpaid) you too can be part of the team. Mail \$2 to CTBA – Gas Division, 15622 Staffordshire Lane, Austin, TX 78717 USA. \$0.63 from every sale will go towards helium for our next flight. With the support of 7,936 of our best friends, we'll be funded and ready to make our next flight.

The new gas manual that Phillip mentions in his article above is available from Pat Brake at Fiesta headquarters. It runs \$50 + shipping. I've heard nothing but terrific things about it, so I'm ordering one sight unseen. Look for a full review in the near future.

### Restaurant reviews

**County Line BBQ.** The Gas Division recently got together with weatherman extraordinaire Lou Billones in Houston. Man can that guy eat! He ordered the “Big Daddy” plate of ribs and licked them clean. Then we had to hold him back from the desert cart. He simply put the rest of us to shame for our poor eating skills. Way to go Lou!

Years ago, before I understood BBQ, I thought County Line was pretty good. But now that I've been living in Texas for a while, I've recognized that part of the BBQ experience is to have the proper surroundings. And that means the restaurant has to be a joint. That's right, there's no room for white linen table clothes and strolling violinists during a Texas BBQ experience. At County Line, the decor was a little bit too fabricated, a little bit too franchised. And even though the brisket and sausage were pretty good, the BBQ sauce was a little disappointing. As a result, County Line comes up short. If this is all you have where you live, well... I'm sorry to hear that. If you're ready to take a road trip, give Goode Company BBQ in Houston a try. That's everything BBQ is supposed to be.

**John Mueller's BBQ.** If you haven't guessed by now, BBQ is pretty popular here in Texas. If we had a state food, I'm sure it would be BBQ. If we had a monument to food, it would be a big pile of ribs smothered in BBQ sauce. Unfortunately, we don't. Instead, Austin is the self proclaimed “live

music capital of the world” and the only monument we have here is the one to Stevie Ray Vaughn down on the shores of Town Lake. When it comes to Blues guitar, Stevie was the man. Tragically, he died in a helicopter crash at the peak of his career. He was an Austin native and our best musician ever. We still think about him almost every day. His music will be enjoyed for generations.

Back to Mueller’s. I had to stop by the airport the other day to straighten out a problem with an airline ticket and just happened to have my restaurant critic with me. On the way back, we took a slight detour to reach John Mueller’s BBQ. If you live in Austin, the last name may sound familiar. Louis Mueller’s BBQ in Taylor, TX is one of the top BBQ spots in all of Texas. So that means it’s also one of the top BBQ places in the world. And that means it’s pretty dang good. John is part of the family legacy and has the privilege of calling Louis by the name of “grandpa.”

This place has the ambiance you expect to find in a world class BBQ joint – dirt parking lot, linoleum floor, tables with uneven legs, screen doors swinging open in the breeze and good folks behind the counter serving you big piles of BBQ.

My BBQ sandwich was one of the best things I have ever put in my mouth (food or otherwise). It was simply world class. Fantastically cooked brisket, with just the right amount of seasoning, smothered with tangy BBQ sauce, all on a fresh bun the size of Rhode Island. Now this is eating! The rest of the crew had the smoked turkey, which looked very tasty and also got good reviews. John Mueller’s gets the CTBA – Gas Division seal of approval.

**Railroad BBQ.** Just when you think it’s time to eat something else, along comes another BBQ joint and thoughts of quiche go out the window for another day. We never would have found this place if it wasn’t for gas balloonist wannabe Dan Sherrill. We stopped by to see Dan in Buda the other day and, since he owns Railroad BBQ, suggested we stop by on our way home. It’s in a little town called Hayes, TX a bit off the beaten path. But this is a BBQ joint at its finest – corrugated metal roof, rustic interior with the obligatory hunting trophies on the wall. I think there may even be a few gunshot holes in the roof. As always, I was smitten by the brisket, but need to point out the ribs were finger lickin’ good. We’re definitely looking forward to our next visit with Dan and our next stop at Railroad BBQ.

**Artz Rib House.** These guys have the best ribs and sauce in this town. Take the word of an ex-carnivore. It’s located on Lamar, has a nice atmosphere with acceptable groove. Live music on Friday nights. Don’t miss the garlic soup.

### Movie reviews

**The Seven Samurai** – The Akira Kurosawa film festival was recently in town and the CTBA- GD got together to view The Seven Samurai, perhaps his best-known film. Did you know this thing is four hours long? After being hypnotized by Hollywood into thinking moving should only last 1 hr. 47 min, we were concerned we would be able to sit through this one. But when you are watching a beautifully-made movie, well...., it could just as well be six hours long.

In retrospect, you can’t believe how fast four hours go by when you get totally absorbed in one of the best movies ever made. A 16<sup>th</sup> century Japanese village hires seven samurais to defend them against bandits. Beautiful cinematography, terrific acting, excellent story - the holy trinity of moviemaking. After the intermission, I was totally riveted. Well, maybe the triple espresso I had at intermission

was the reason I was riveted. Overall this was a marvelous and captivating film, which has been copied by others and influenced many. Definitely two thumbs up!

**Dancer, Texas, Population 81** – Imagine growing up in a town in the middle of nowhere, in a town that just 81 people call home. Ever since you were twelve, you and your three best friends planned to leave for L.A. right after high school graduation. But when the day finally comes, do you really have the courage to get up and leave the only place you've ever called home?

Director Tim McCanlies has created a beautiful and touching story of how four high school graduates react when facing the unknown. The movie has some great West Texas landscapes, and for once - a surprise – no aliens flying around in space ships blowing things up with laser cannons. This movie shows the art of story telling is still alive and well. Highly recommended if you want to see the part of the world the CTBA- Gas Division calls home. Shucks, highly recommended even if you live here. Two enthusiastic thumbs up!

**Lost in La Mancha** – A documentary about the making of *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*, Terry Gilliam's latest attempt at a movie. Over the years I've become a big fan of Terry Gilliam. He was the wacky animator in Monty Python (first the TV show, then the movies) then went \$100M over budget on *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (by the way, check out the gas balloon scene in *Baron*.) Along the way, he has created some of the best and most original movies of the last 20 years.

*Lost..* is an entertaining look at what goes on during a major film production, and in this case, all the things that can go wrong. It only took six days before the production was abandoned. In those few days, they were nearly bombed by NATO fighter jets; they were caught in a severe hailstorm that resulted in a flash flood that washed away (and destroyed) all the production equipment. Then Jean Rochefort (the actor playing Don Quixote) developed a slipped disc in his back and couldn't ride a horse (what's a Don Quixote without a horse?). The insurance company decided things had gone so horribly wrong it was an act of God and they were not going to pay off on the policy. Documentaries can be a bit slow, but this one certainly had its entertaining moments. Worth tracking down if you are a fan of Terry Gilliam (*Brazil*, *The Fisher King*, *12 Monkeys*.) Rumor has it he is back working on the film.

**The Good Thief** – Nick Nolte is a retired thief and run down heroin addict. He is an honorable man, lives a simple life in the south of France and is liked by everyone. He's not quite a pillar of the community, but he does have a conscience and tries to do the right thing. Shortly after the story begins, he decides to sober up for one last robbery – stealing 20 impressionist paintings hanging in the Grande Casino in Monaco. This is a great role for Nick and he does a great job with it. Why Nutsa Kukhianidze is even in the movie is hard to understand. The only reason I can think of is when it comes to smoking heroin; you're better off filming a 19-year-old Ukrainian supermodel than a beat up 62-year-old white guy. Predictably, the first half of the movie introduces us to all the characters and sets up for the heist. The second half is like butter – terrific movie making. I guarantee the end will be satisfying.

**Three Colors: Red, White and Blue** – The trilogy by the Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski. Three films in French that will make you sweat. Great film making, great acting. Subtitles for you backwoods folks.

### Circus Review

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**Cirque du Soleil** – If you have ever seen Cirque, you know they are unique to this world. Cirque is part street performance, part gymnastics, part opera, part ballet, part audience participation, part out of body experience and part “that’s impossible – how do they do that?” I’ve seen them on TV, but that’s insignificant compared to sitting in the third row and experiencing it all right in front of you (and directly over your head.) Cirque came to Austin for the first time and brought the Alegria show, complete with their own big top. Me and the bride walked away very impressed and looking forward to the next time we cross paths. Between synchronized trampoline tumbling, aerial ballet, bodies flying, twisting and spinning through the air, klesmer music, contortionists, clowns and even a strong man, it was hard to pick a favorite. There was only one thing wrong with the performance.

It ended.

I’ve told my daughters before they grow up, they need to run away and join the circus. I know just the place to run to.

Until next time, may your flights be long and silent.

Good Floating!

**Greg Winker**

[www.BalloonWinker.com](http://www.BalloonWinker.com)

Still the official website of the CTBA – Gas Division