

A giant orange orb rose into the skies of Orange County Sunday as workers prepared for the official Orange County Great Park Balloon launch on July 14.

JEBB HARRIS, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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BALLOON TIMELINE

Jan. 23, 2006: Ken Smith's design team picked to design the park. His plan includes three orange balloons that over time are narrowed to one balloon. Park Engineer Pat Fuscoe says Smith got the idea when thinking about big ideas for the park. In the middle of that discussion, Fuscoe says that Smith thought of a balloon. "He had seen them in other places, in Europe. And then he forged it into what it is now, the orange balloon for Orange County, with its symbolism of our citrus heritage."

July 11, 2006: Irvine City Council accepts a gift by the Lennar Corp. of the company footing \$1 million for the balloon, along with \$300,000 a year for the balloon's first three years. The council moves towards having the balloon open in the fall of 2006.

Oct. 19, 2006: Then Great Park CEO Wally Kreutzen says the balloon won't launch until at least spring 2007. The holdup comes after the designers decide to install the balloon at its final resting spot, rather than at a temporary location on the base.

Dec. 21, 2006: Great Park Board recommends approval of the balloon funding.

Dec. 29, 2006: The last piece of the balloon, the orange fabric, arrives from France in a large, wooden container. Already arrived were the cables, 17,000-pound hydraulic winch, and eight pieces for the gondola.

April 19, 2007: Cal-Pac Engineering Co. Inc. is the winning bidder, the lowest of five bidders - at \$2.67 million, to build a landing pad, parking lot and a temporary visitor's center, among other things, for the orange, passenger helium balloon.

April 26, 2007: Great Park Board approves balloon pricing: \$20 per adult, \$13 for children.

May 15, 2007: City Council approves more design features for the balloon site: orange dots on the entrance road, boxed orange trees, a historical timeline and native grasses for a meadow.

May 24, 2007:City Council makes balloon rides free through the end of 2007. "It really is unconscionable, as our first element, to say for a family to go up in this balloon it's going to cost \$70," said Councilman Larry Agran.

June 14, 2007:Great Park Board moves towards some, small ads at the balloon attraction – but says no to ads on the sides of the orange orb.

June 24, 2007:Balloon cleared for flying by the Federal Aviation Agency.

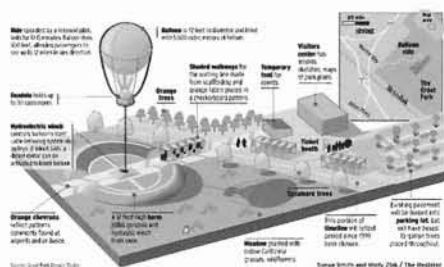
July 7, 2007:Balloon inflated with 5,500 cubic meters of helium.

July 13, 2007:Media is allowed from 10 a.m.-noon to ride the balloon.

July 14, 2007:Balloon will open to the public at 9 a.m.

SOURCE: Register reports.

Graphic



[See plans for the balloon attraction area.](#)

Thursday, July 12, 2007

Great Park balloon ready for take-off

First public passengers will fly Saturday; regular flights start next week.

By **SONYA SMITH**
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

IRVINE – The big orange balloon launches Saturday and will take its first passengers from the public up 500 feet above the Great Park.

Great Park Engineer Pat Fuscoe has said that lead park designer Ken Smith first dreamed up the balloon when thinking about ideas for the park.

"He had some knowledge of (balloons). He had seen them in other places, in Europe. And then he forged it into what it is now, the orange balloon for Orange County, with its symbolism

of our citrus heritage."

The attraction opens to the public Saturday. On that day, the area opens at 9 a.m., speeches are at 10 a.m. and rides should begin at 10:30 a.m.

The balloon is closed Sunday, as staff takes down temporary displays from the Saturday event. The balloon will then open permanently for rides July 20.

Admission is free. The balloon operates Thursday-Sunday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. (weather permitting). Boarding passes are issued on a first-come, first-served basis. Flights may be delayed or canceled due to weather conditions. Patrons are encouraged to call ahead for flight status. Thursday flights are available by reservation for groups and corporate outings. No more than 25 passengers can ride in the balloon at one time. Every passenger must sign a liability waiver, and children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult.

For information on tickets, group reservations and live updates on flying conditions, go to www.greatparkballoon.org/.

Directions: The old El Toro base. Heading north on Sand Canyon Avenue: turn right onto Marine Way (just after the I-5); turn left at the guard shack and follow the signs to the balloon.

Information: 866-829-3829, groups@greatparkballoon.org, or www.greatparkballoon.org.

The balloon's first year of operation is expected to cost \$957,600 – that includes balloon-maker Aerophile's operations, management and maintenance, \$110,000 for liability insurance, \$100,000 set aside to replace the balloon's orange fabric every five years, \$93,600 for temporary restrooms, other costs for operations, maintenance and \$30,000 for signs and graphics.

The park's lead designer, Ken Smith, has called for a "mini-park" around the balloon, including meadows, orange trees, sycamores and a temporary visitors center. Each piece represents a different part of the larger Great Park to come.

Among those:

- **A berm** almost surrounding the balloon hides the gondola and mechanics, and also artistically mirrors plans for the park's 2-mile-long canyon.
- **Orange trees** symbolize the orange groves to be included in the park – a reminder of the city and county's agricultural past.
- **Meadows** next to the balloon will be planted with native and drought-tolerant grasses and wildflowers, as will be done in most of the Great Park.
- **Small trees** will be planted in wooden boxes in the parking lot to show how the park will grow over time.

"I hope it's something people will like," Smith says.

Some officials have said that launching the balloon before the park is built will allow the public

a bird's-eye view. Others have said the balloon should not to save money and to ensure there are enough riders.