



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

MORE PHOTOS

Saturday, July 7, 2007

Orange balloon rises to the occasion

Great Park attraction comes to life Saturday night after being pumped with 5,500 cubic meters of helium.

By SONYA SMITH
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

IRVINE – Disneyland's Matterhorn, the Angels' Big "A" and other Orange County landmarks were joined Saturday night by a huge orange balloon.

This first element of the Great Park rose over six hours to its height of five stories. The attraction will float 500 feet aloft and offer visitors up to 12-mile views of central Orange County, beginning July 14.

At 6 p.m. Saturday, employees of the balloon manufacturer – Aerophile – were waiting for more workers to help with the inflation. After about an hour, the inflation began with a sharp whistle by Aerophile's Management Director Matthew Gobbi.

He ordered everyone – workers, managers and even Great Park publicists – to help anchor the balloon. As the balloon filled with helium, each person adjusted weights to keep it from flying away.

At about 8 p.m. the orange orb looked more like a pumpkin, but workers planned to work until midnight to fill it up.

The balloon is expected to attract more than 50,000 riders during its first year.

The attraction will operate six hours during the day, Thursday through Sunday, year-round in good weather.

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 **bermalmost** 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 launching the balloon before the park is built will allow the public to watch the construction from a bird's-eye view. Others have said the balloon should not launch before the park opens – to save money and to ensure there are enough riders.

Contact the writer: 949-553-2911 or sosmith@ocregister.com



WAITING TO INFLATE: Construction worker Paul Davis waits Saturday for more workers to get on site. They began the four-hour helium inflation for the Great Park balloon. Full inflation was expected by midnight.

CINDY YAMANAKA, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER
Sunday, July 8, 2007

Balloon rises to the occasion

By SONYA SMITH
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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maintenance, signs and graphics. The balloon itself cost \$994,300. Construction of the site cost \$2.67 million.

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.

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