

Friday, January 11, 2008

## **Irvine's Great Park balloon flying high again**

**Attraction reopens Thursday after being damaged last month by strong winds.**

City News Service

IRVINE – Orange County's Great Park balloon reopened Thursday after being [closed for repairs](#) for nearly a month, wafting nearly 200 people above the former El Toro Marine Corps Air Station, officials said.

A line of 21 people stood ready to take the trip some 400 feet into the air when doors to the visitors center opened at 10 a.m., said Rod Cooper, manager of operations for the Great Park Corp.

"It was gorgeous weather," he said.

The balloon was knocked out of commission Dec. 21, when strong gusts of wind banged the gondola around and broke three of eight tires, which had to be ordered from Paris, home of the manufacturer, Aerophile.

"It wasn't so much the location" of where the parts had to be ordered, Cooper said, but the holidays with suppliers shut down.

Crews will take additional steps in mooring the balloon in an attempt to avoid a repetition of the damage, Cooper said.

It cost the city, which is developing the 1,350-acre urban park, "less than \$5,000" for the repairs, Cooper said.

The manufacturer paid for technicians' time to fix the balloon, while the city picked up airfare from France, Cooper said.

The balloon operates 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., weather permitting, Thursday through Sunday, and is free, but there will be charges at a later time. It will begin evening flights in the spring, Cooper said.



UP, UP, AND AWAY: Friday morning, customers ride the Great Park Balloon over the former El Toro Marine Corps Air Station. The balloon was shut down for three weeks after its landing wheels suffered damage in strong Santa Ana winds. Rain delays, and parts coming from Paris, France, slowed repairs.

BRUCE CHAMBERS, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

