

Get a rise out of ballooning

If I rise on the wind of the Morning, and fly to the outer most parts of the sea, there Your right hand will guide me, your strength will protect me.

That is why I am at peace while I'm in the air or on the ground, God through His son Jesus is always with me.

— from the Balloonist's Prayer

By Howard Huntington
of the Daily Courier

Marie Shepherd knew she was taking a chance hiring a hot-air balloon to take her husband on a birthday ride.

Shepherd, of Grants Pass, had taken her first ride in 2001, as a surprise Mother's Day gift from her son, Robert.

"The sun was coming up and it was just unbelievable," she said. "I'd do it every day, if I could."

In 2010, it was Larry Shepherd's turn. "I surprised my husband with it because it was something he said he'd never want to do," Marie said.

"He loved it. Now, he wants to buy a gyrocopter and all that stuff."

The Shepherds flew with Bill Woodhead, one of at least two expert balloonists you can hire to show you around the Rogue Valley.

Rick Major of Grants Pass also took his 86-year-old mother, Jean, completely by surprise. "She had no idea until we got there and they were unloading the trailer," he said. "Then she finally just asked me, 'Is this a balloon ride?'"

"She was thrilled. It was something she always wanted to do."

It also was Rick Major's first.

"I've been up in helicopters. I've been up in airplanes. But I've never been on a balloon ride. It's just so quiet, a good view of the town and just like drifting along," he said. "I'd love to take people up."

Some particulars about bal-



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Balloonist Bill Woodhead takes off with passengers in his WWJD balloon.

loon rides for any occasion:

**HIS SKY BALLOONS
GRANTS PASS**

■ **SEASON:** early May

through October, depending on the weather.

■ **DAYS:** Monday through Saturday.

■ **LAUNCH SITES:** various.

■ **RESERVATIONS:** 541-476-6363. Call at least two to four weeks in advance.

■ **CAPACITY:** four passengers.

■ **PRICE:** \$225 per person.

■ **FLIGHT TIME:** about an hour, plus two hours preparing to launch and packing up the balloon afterward. You're welcome to help.

■ **"PILOT CHAMPAGNE"** — sparkling cider — served after your flight.

■ **AGE LIMIT:** at least 8 years old.

■ **YOUR PILOT:** Bill Woodhead, a balloonist for more than 30 years, flying his well-known WWJD — "Walk With Jesus Daily" — balloon.

■ **MORE INFORMATION:** 541-476-6363.

Get Woodhead to tell you about his adventures ballooning over Africa, Israel and all over the U.S. and Canada.

"Sometimes, when the skies are empty, it's because Bill is flying elsewhere in the country," he said.

You're also invited to participate regularly as a balloon handler or recovery driver on the His Sky crew.

ROGUE VALLEY BALLOON CENTRAL POINT

■ **SEASON:** June through mid-October.

■ **DAYS:** Saturday and Sunday.

■ **RESERVATIONS:** 541-664-1862 or email to rvballoons@yahoo.com. Contact as soon as possible.

■ **RATES:** \$150 per person.

■ **LAUNCH SITE:** Jewett Elementary School, 1001 Manzanita St. in Central Point. From Grants Pass, take Interstate 5 south to exit 33. Right on East Pine Street, right again on North 10th Street, left on Manzanita.

■ **CAPACITY:** two to three passengers.

■ **YOUR PILOT:** Larry Sprague, licensed for 16 years.

■ **FLIGHT TIME:** about 45 to 60 minutes, plus two hours preparing to launch and packing up afterward — you're welcome to join the crew — and celebrating.

■ **POST-FLIGHT CELEBRA-**