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Volunteers work hard ahead of balloon races

BY VICTOR CALDERON

vcalderon@gmail.com

The Great Reno Balloon Race may be a little over two months away but a group of devoted volunteers has been working behind the scenes since last year's event to prepare for the first weekend in September.

Known as the Aeronauts, they are the official volunteer group for the race, which will be Sept. 5-7 at Rancho San Rafael Regional Park.

The largest project for the Aeronauts is supporting the race in areas such as field setup and breakdown, security and pilot crewing.

"It's just a kick helping out with the balloon races," said Shirley Keys, Aeronauts president.

On race days, the Aeronauts arrive at the field as early as 3 a.m. In crewing, it takes five volunteers as few as 10 minutes to get a balloon going in the air, depending on the pilot, said Ed Buzzetti, an Aeronaut since 1991.

When the pilot is ready to come down, the same crew that launched it turns into the chase crew. They have to follow the balloon to wherever it lands and help the pilot do so safely.

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SUBMITTED BY KEN TERRY

Aeronauts pull a balloon envelope out of its bag. From left to right are Larry Erls, Jerry Borton, Tom Stames and Balloon Race pilot Vince Casey. This picture was taken by Ken Terry at last year's Prosser campout, another event Aeronauts volunteer at during the year.

