

# **Narrative of the Lions Club's Historic Parade Balloon 2005**

**It all started with an idea hatched by Doc and Ralph in the backroom of Lucky's Hardware. "I was thinking... Why not a float balloon like they have in Macy's parade?" Doc asked; to which Ralph responded "I like it... how do we get it around the wires on Broadway?" And so the plot was hatched. The Lions Club meeting was the next night, and the idea was presented to the membership. The response was infectious.**

**For the first time in maybe two generations the Lions Club would be marching in a local 5/30/05 Memorial Day parade. If we were to make our presence know and garner membership to grow, this was it! There were only 8 weeks to make something happen. The Balloon would be the key as there had never been a hot air balloon in any Bayonne parade of this size. And while we at it, we would see if we could reuse one of the balloons from the Triangle on 8<sup>th</sup> Street as a backup. Perhaps the Flag Balloon on the float as that was patriotic.**

**President Matt Dorans took on the responsibility of finding a balloon. Mark Rubin assisted him as he had a contact with Macy's. Ralph Pasqua was to call Gary Chiemelewski at City Hall to find out if there were any balloon prohibitions by ordinance. Doc Wick was to start planning the Float, checking with the EPA on helium emissions, securing some cars for the older officers, getting the magnetic decals, notifying the Memorial Day Committee, and developing a check list. It was decide that we would solicit donations to pay for the balloon and thereby issue a commemorative T-shirt to the sponsors.**

**The sponsors included local businesses and two out of town groups owned by locals. They included: Lawson Communications Systems, Provident Savings Bank, Pamrapo Savings Bank, Bayonne Community Bank, J and J Printing, Gibraltar Electric, Ernest Construction, In-Line Air Conditioning, Exit Realty of Bayonne, RnBz Tavern and Grill, Lucky's Ace Hardware. Also included were Walter James Gallery of Ct, and Blue Ridge Profit group of Washington DC. The T-shirts were Lions yellow and given to the marchers along with flag hats,**

**To add to pressure on the deadline, the balloon manufacturer was stranded in Italy, Orsini printing had trouble with the graphics ( and spelling), the banners for the Club were delayed , and two meetings were cancelled. With days to go it all came together, and the parade line of march was set. The disappointment was with the cars, as the promised 3 antique convertibles came down to one which was owned by Mark Rubin. The Parade Committee assigned us to section 3 ironically after the Bridgemen ( making their Anniversary return) then Kiwanis ( Ralph's father's Lucky organization) and then Lions.**

**The inflating of the balloon was the issue. It arrived for that last meeting but had never been really examined. We guessed that it would require two tanks of helium. Originally we decided to work on the balloon at 9am on Sunday 5/29<sup>th</sup> and it can be seen rolled out on the floor at RnBz Tavern. It was decided to inflate the balloon at In Line Air Conditioning's warehouse on East 21<sup>st</sup> Street, the locations of the blow up photos ) and move it to the line of march on 5<sup>th</sup> Street Monday morning. All did not go smoothly as the 2 tanks were only 1 ½ tanks; so we used nitrogen to smooth the balloon out. The charger for the float needed replacement , and the day dragged**

into the afternoon. In the morning three people were available to move the balloon. Ralph went off to see his son start the parade in Cranford and Doc went to RnBz to set up the photography. Doc took the digital and video of the parade from under the 8<sup>th</sup> street bridge/Linnet Street location and at 39<sup>th</sup> Street where the parade turns for the reviewing platform at the park. Victoria Titus took the photos at the assembly area. These documents are available and will be given to the Bayonne Historical Society.

It was a stunning day for the parade and it all went well. Despite flyers and press releases, the Jersey Journal did not mention the balloon, and the photo essay from the Community News did not include it. There was a disadvantage in being in the third section. However the people of Bayonne did and several letters actually came in. While Doc was on 39<sup>th</sup> Street a couple from Pennsylvania engaged him in conversation. He said:” You made me eat my words, I came here to see relatives on 9<sup>th</sup> street ( but we parked uptown).” He said to his nieces;”... so what do you think I am going to see in a small hometown parade.. .a Macy’s balloon? Then sure enough out popped the Lion floating in the air under the 8<sup>th</sup> Street bridge...” It looked terrific bobbing down the avenue. It was visible for miles in the bright orange....

There was immediately issued an invitation for the Columbus Day parade in October 05. But to avoid using up a novelty the Lion balloon will go into storage for Memorial Day 06. Ralph and Doc are thinking in terms of a Live Music float with Italian songs for that.

Walter Wick (Wiechetek) MD archivist