



# CAP's Hot Air Balloon Program

*New Training Program Launched in New Mexico*

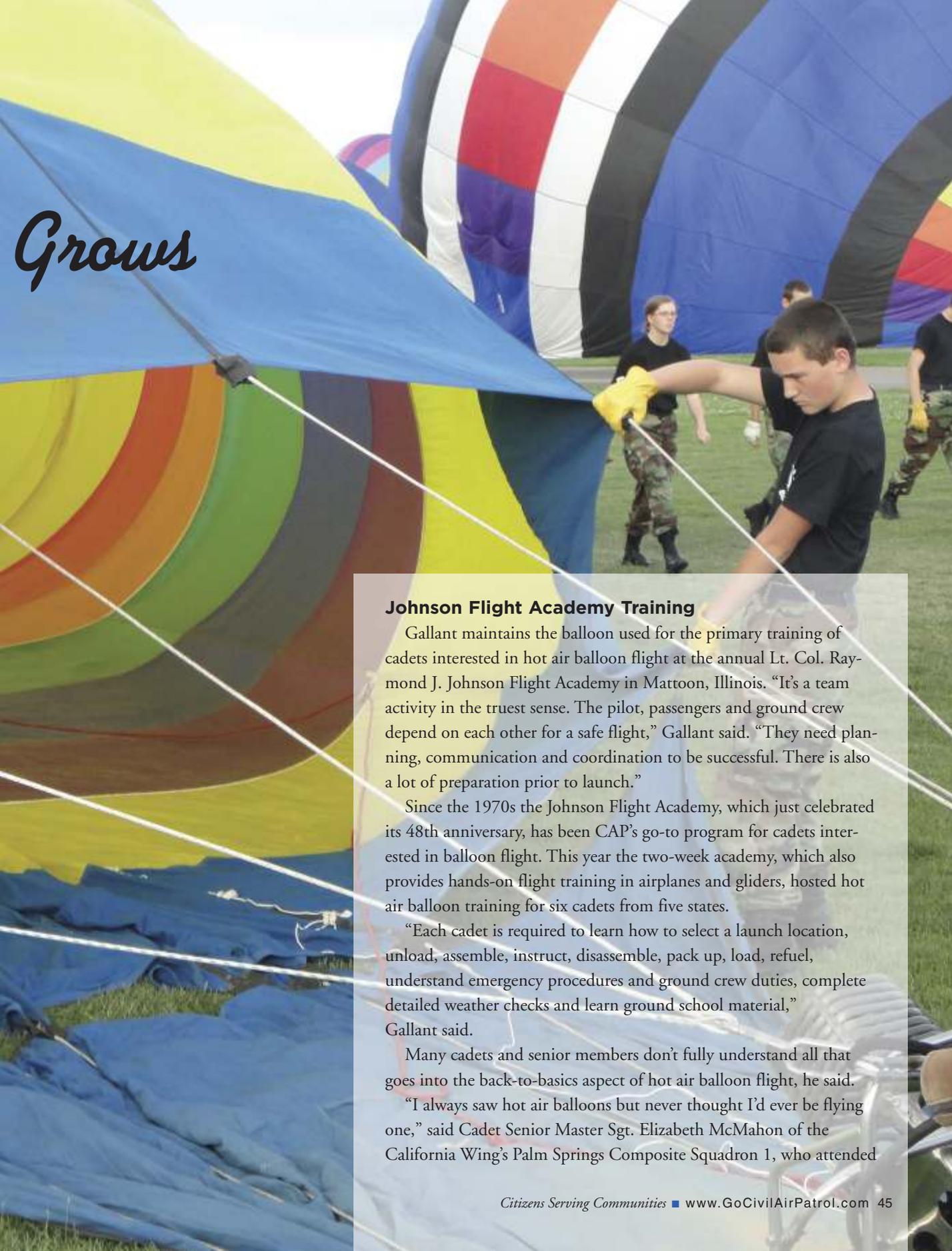
*By Mitzi Palmer*

**T**oday, more than 230 years after the first hot air balloon took to the skies above the French town of Annonay, people remain intrigued by this unique method of flight.

**“Hot air ballooning attracts people like crazy,” said 1st Lt. Mike Gallant, head of the Indiana Wing’s balloon program. “Anytime the CAP balloon gets set up, people just appear out of nowhere. Sometimes groups of cars follow us just for pictures and to ask us questions about it.”**

Cadet Chief Master Sgt. Raily Blankley, left, and Cadet Master Sgt. J.D. Downing hold open the bottom of a hot air balloon for inflation. Blankley belongs to the New Mexico Wing's LBJ Middle School Cadet Squadron, while Downing is a member of the Los Alamos Composite Squadron. Photo by 1st Lt. Ryan M. Stark, New Mexico Wing

# Grows



## **Johnson Flight Academy Training**

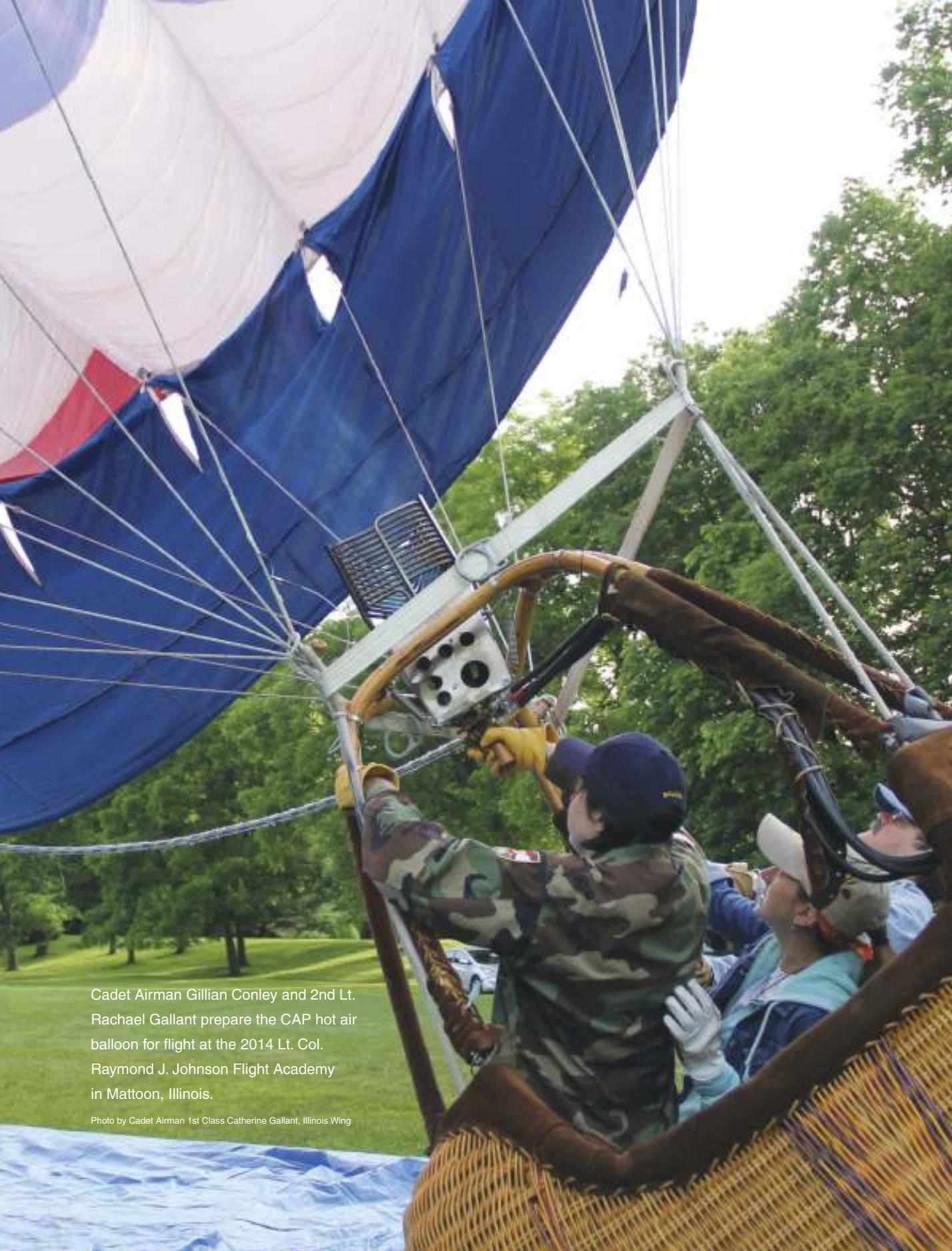
Gallant maintains the balloon used for the primary training of cadets interested in hot air balloon flight at the annual Lt. Col. Raymond J. Johnson Flight Academy in Mattoon, Illinois. “It’s a team activity in the truest sense. The pilot, passengers and ground crew depend on each other for a safe flight,” Gallant said. “They need planning, communication and coordination to be successful. There is also a lot of preparation prior to launch.”

Since the 1970s the Johnson Flight Academy, which just celebrated its 48th anniversary, has been CAP’s go-to program for cadets interested in balloon flight. This year the two-week academy, which also provides hands-on flight training in airplanes and gliders, hosted hot air balloon training for six cadets from five states.

“Each cadet is required to learn how to select a launch location, unload, assemble, instruct, disassemble, pack up, load, refuel, understand emergency procedures and ground crew duties, complete detailed weather checks and learn ground school material,” Gallant said.

Many cadets and senior members don’t fully understand all that goes into the back-to-basics aspect of hot air balloon flight, he said.

“I always saw hot air balloons but never thought I’d ever be flying one,” said Cadet Senior Master Sgt. Elizabeth McMahon of the California Wing’s Palm Springs Composite Squadron 1, who attended



Cadet Airman Gillian Conley and 2nd Lt. Rachael Gallant prepare the CAP hot air balloon for flight at the 2014 Lt. Col. Raymond J. Johnson Flight Academy in Mattoon, Illinois.

Photo by Cadet Airman 1st Class Catherine Gallant, Illinois Wing

the Johnson Flight Academy this year.

“It made me want to become a balloon pilot, and I definitely plan on going back next year,” she said.

Gallant and his team, which includes Capts. Wayne Werner and Sue Louck and 2nd Lt. Rachael Gallant — Gallant’s daughter, who first attended the academy as a cadet in 2005 and is now a licensed pilot and senior staff member — are part of the Montgolfier Society of Indiana, the Ballooning Association of Greater Illinois and the Balloon Federation of America.

The CAP balloon has participated in the Indiana State Airshow and the Indiana Balloon Fest to generate interest in the program.

### **New Mexico Wing’s New Balloon Program**

In July, under the leadership of Group 800 Commander Maj. Ben Noyce, the New Mexico Wing launched a new hot air balloon program during its first CAP Balloon Ground Crew Clinic.

During the three-day chase crew clinic in New Mexico, globally known as the Hot Air Ballooning Capital of the World, 18 cadets and four senior members participated. “Each completed the clinic and have continued to serve at many flying events, both CAP and non-CAP, logging their experience into their crew logbooks — similar to a pilot logbook but for ground crews,” said Noyce, who is program director of the New Mexico Wing’s hot air balloon program and a student pilot.

Noyce has encouraged his fellow squadron members to assist as chase crew members in the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta as well as other balloon flying events for many years. He said interest in hot air balloon flight — especially the chase crew element — is growing.

“The overall goal of our ballooning program is to offer aerospace education and the ability for cadets to work

with another airframe, update the text and modules used to teach about balloons, eventually incorporate an orientation flight portion with balloons and hopefully expand to have our own hot air balloon pilot academy here in New Mexico similar to the glider encampment/academy.”

Noyce’s experience with ballooning started in 2002 when he was a sales representative for Kodak cameras at the Albuquerque festival. He soon became a public safety officer for the event and then a chase crew member during the off-season. His first flight was in 2011.

“New Mexico has the greatest weather to allow ballooning practically year-round, with many visible balloons in the skyline every morning, so finding a crew to assist is quite easy,” he said. “It’s great to show cadets how they can become more engaged in aerospace activities — more than just marshaling on the flight line.

Noyce said the new program in New Mexico is getting positive feedback — not only from CAP members but also local residents and organizations.

“We are hearing that the cadets are really enjoying the hands-on work and teamwork required to be a part of a ground chase crew,” he said. “They also enjoy the full interaction during the flight, the hands-on work during setup, the launch, the chase, helping the aircrew with navigation and landing and then assisting with the landing and packing up.

“It’s a lot of hard work but so worth the experience,” he said.

Currently, the ballooning group for the New Mexico Wing has enrolled three commercial-rated pilots — Capts. Al Lowenstein, William Manus and Jessica Makin, who Noyce said are the keys to the program’s success. ▲



Maj. William Fitzpatrick of the LBJ Middle School Cadet Squadron briefs New Mexico Wing cadets on the final day of the wing’s first-ever hot air balloon clinic at Balloon Fiesta Park in Albuquerque. Photo by 1st Lt. Ryan M. Stark, New Mexico Wing