

ROBORAVING THE 8TH GRADE

Here's the challenge: build a robot that weighs between 1 and 1.5 kilograms and covers an area 400 square centimeters, capable of pushing other similarly sized robots out of a circle about 125 centimeters across. That's 2.2 to 3.3 pounds and just over one square foot, in an arena about four feet wide, for those clinging to the imperial system like it's 1824.

Two Rio Rancho students recently did just that. Abigail Catanzaro and Garnet Waldrop—8th graders at the ASK Academy—built a sumo-bot and with it placed 17th in a field of 94 at RoboRAVE North America. Appropriately enough, they named it Suomo.

From there, they shifted up to the international stage, traveling this past July to Chonghua, China, for RoboRAVE International. There, they were greeted with something of a curveball.

A lot of their robot was built from Lego parts (excluding the motor and wiring, of course), but it was encased in a metal shell—part of an upgrade designed and fabricated with help from Sigma Labs, Inc. That pushed them into stiffer competition with heavier robots.

In response, Catanzaro and Waldrop improvised. With a recipe of lead shot and applied physics, they took 11th place among 36 teams. Pretty impressive—especially in light of a last minute rule change. —ZB ♡



WIND RIDERS



The Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta returns to the Duke City this month and this time Albuquerqueans are in for a special treat. The documentary film *Wind Riders*, which premiered at the Manhattan Film Festival last May, will be making its Albuquerque debut.

The film, which has been in the making for nearly a decade, follows the legendary Albuquerque ballooning team of Richard Abruzzo and Carol Rymer Davis. Using archival footage, the documentary follows the balloonists in the years leading up to their 2010 entry in the Gordon Bennett Cup, the world's oldest gas balloon race. As many locals know, the journey ended in a tragedy that rocked the ballooning community when Abruzzo and Rymer Davis were lost over the Adriatic Sea on September 29, 2010.

Abruzzo's widow, Nancy, still lives in Albuquerque, and says the film was difficult to watch, but also beautiful. "The film certainly brings all of the old emotions to the surface," she says. "But it was really thrilling to see the passion that (Richard)

had for ballooning. The film provides a very unique insight into gas ballooning and shows the beauty of it and the joy it brought to Richard." Nancy says the filmmakers were very sensitive and aware of the feelings the film may invoke for the members of the Abruzzo and Davis families.

"We're honored for this opportunity," says producer and director Emi Katayama. "In recent years entering to a recognized film festival has been very tough for documentary films as the number of indie films have increased to thousands."

The film will open at the Kimo Theatre on October 7 with a 7 p.m. screening followed by a Q & A with the filmmakers and guests. Follow up screenings will happen at 6 p.m. on October 8 and 9.

In addition, Balloon Fiesta attendees will get a chance to view the two-minute trailer on the large monitor at the Balloon Fiesta and on the Fiesta's YouTube live stream, Balloon Fiesta Live! on the morning of October 6. —TH ♡

Beers With...



Nancy Abruzzo

PAST BOARD PRESIDENT, ANDERSON-ABRUZZO INTERNATIONAL BALLOON MUSEUM FOUNDATION

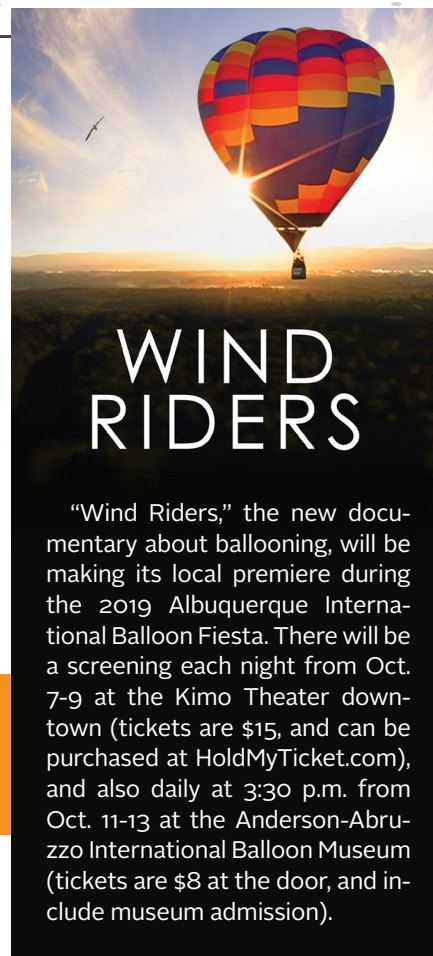
Few things define our city more than ballooning—a sport put on the local map in large part by the passion and ongoing legacy of the Abruzzo family of Albuquerque. Thus, when Richard Abruzzo died tragically in 2010 while competing in a European gas balloon race, the city bowed its collective head in mourning. Abruzzo's widow, Nancy, had to wait nearly 70 days before officials located the bodies of her husband and Carol Rymer Davis, the balloon's co-pilot, in the Adriatic Sea near Italy. She says not a day goes by without thoughts of Richard, whose father, Ben Abruzzo, was aboard the Double Eagle II in 1978 when it became the first balloon to cross the Atlantic Ocean. But as the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta season approaches, Nancy has something else to look forward to: the local premiere of "Wind Riders," a documentary film that features Richard's exploits as a record-setting balloonist. The film, produced by New York filmmaker Emi Katayama, was voted Best Documentary in audience voting during its debut at the Manhattan Film Festival in May. It's set for several ABQ

ALBUQUERQUE THE MAGAZINE: One of the unique things about the documentary is that it talks at length about gas ballooning, which is less familiar to most people than hot air balloons.

NANCY ABRUZZO: Yes, the film really does give a bird's-eye perspective of both forms of flight, and both forms of

balloons. I think the vast majority of spectators at a hot air balloon festival don't necessarily know the competitive side of a gas balloon.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Hot air balloons use rising air warmed by burners to stay aloft, whereas gas balloons are filled with a gas—typically hydrogen—that's lighter than air. These balloons are designed to stay aloft longer, and in harsher weather conditions, thus



WIND RIDERS

"Wind Riders," the new documentary about ballooning, will be making its local premiere during the 2019 Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta. There will be a screening each night from Oct. 7-9 at the Kimo Theater downtown (tickets are \$15, and can be purchased at HoldMyTicket.com), and also daily at 3:30 p.m. from Oct. 11-13 at the Anderson-Abruzzo International Balloon Museum (tickets are \$8 at the door, and include museum admission).

screenings during Balloon Fiesta week, and is poised to find an even wider audience through distribution channels like Netflix. In the nearly nine years since the tragedy, Nancy says things have slowly become easier for her and her family in Richard's absence. Their daughter, Mary Pat, 21, is a college senior in California, with interests in business and tennis; their son, Rico, 16, attends Albuquerque Academy, and loves soccer "and everything that he can get his hands into," says Nancy. As for herself, Nancy says she is in a relationship, and is still active in fundraising and ambassador roles for both the Balloon Fiesta and the Anderson-Abruzzo International Balloon Museum Foundation. She's also a shareholder in the portfolio of Abruzzo family businesses, which includes Ski Santa Fe, Sandia Peak ski and tram, and the newly opened Ten3 restaurant atop Sandia Peak. On the eve of the 48th annual Balloon Fiesta, we were able to sit down with Nancy for a beverage (she chose a Grey Goose martini) and some conversation.

there are numerous gas balloon distance and endurance competitions around the world.)

NA: And hopefully the film will resonate with the young ones in our community and plant a seed that they can participate in ballooning in all of its forms. We're always looking for that younger community to continue our sport, and to continue what has

made New Mexico so beautiful, this balloon festival. I think it's a good film to show kids, adolescents, families. It's fun, it's colorful, it's exciting, and it's meaningful.

ATM: Ballooning runs in the Abruzzo family. Tell us how much of a passion that was for Richard.

NA: He was truly a student of ballooning, and he was a master of it. He never took anything for granted. Every year I saw him prepare more and more than the year previous. It's like he was never complacent when it came to ballooning. So, that always provided comfort and reassurance and confidence for me. Plus, he loved it, and it was something that meant so much to him. He was amazing, and he was awesome.

ATM: When did you first realize how serious he was about the sport?

NA: I knew it from the first time I met him. Richard was the co-pilot on the Earthwinds project, which was Barron Hilton's attempt (in the mid-1990s) to have a team circumnavigate the world in a balloon. At the time, there were a few other projects going on to be the first to go around the world in a balloon nonstop. I found that fascinating. It was a whole new world that I didn't even know existed. Then they had equipment failure pretty early on when they launched the flight. And it was such a terrifying feeling not knowing or understanding what was going on. You know, you sit in the command center and everybody is speaking a foreign language really.

ATM: That must have been a pretty helpless feeling for you.

NA: It was. And so then I said to myself, "I need to get smart about this." That's when I decided to get my (balloon) pilot's license, more for the understanding of what was happening and what he would be participating in. Once I got a little more understanding of when something fails, it wasn't that total feeling of fear.

ATM: How hard was it to get your balloon pilot's license?

NA: There's quite a bit of hours and

schooling involved. You have to do the hours behind the desk, and then out on the field. You log so many hours, and then you have to do a solo flight.

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On my first solo I landed hard and fast, but it was exciting.”

ATM: Sounds like it's quite an involved process. In other words, you can't fake it.

NA: You can't fake it, no.

ATM: Tell us about your solo flight.

NA: I took off from the old Balloon Fiesta field. And then I flew north down toward Santa Ana (Pueblo). It was an exciting landing [laughs] because the winds picked up and it was really hard for me to commit to land. So I kept doing this yo-yo, up then down. But I could really tell that the winds were not slowing down, so finally I just committed and pulled the envelope and held on! I landed hard and fast and then I slid for a while, but it was exciting. (Balloon Fiesta co-founder) Sid Cutter signed me off on my license. He and Richard were my chase crew. And they were like, "Well, you committed!" And I did.

ATM: It sounds like Richard had quite a few famous friends in the adventure sports community.

NA: Sid Cutter was a close family friend, and of course Richard's dad, Ben Abruzzo, was in the Double Eagle II (the first balloon to cross the Atlantic Ocean). And Richard flew several races with former (New Mexico) governor Gary Johnson. Gary's a fixed-wing pilot, and when he was the governor, he co-piloted some races with Rich, and they did exceptionally well, too. (The pair won the America's

Cup Challenge gas balloon race in 2002 and 2004).

ATM: Richard, of course, was co-piloting the balloon with Carol Rymer Davis, who was also lost in the tragedy. Tell us about their ballooning partnership.

NA: It was a wonderful ballooning marriage, for sure. I knew that Rich knew Carol for some time before they started to fly together, just through ballooning circles. And she was an incredibly accomplished pilot in her own right. She was a one-in-a-million type of woman, highly accomplished in all the fields that she did. She was doing a gas ballooning flight, and I think Rich and her connected after that flight, and then they decided to fly together the next year. And the rest is history. They really worked well together.

ATM: You mentioned that the filmmakers actually started shooting footage for this documentary back in 2005.

NA: Yes, it's been a long labor of love for them in creating this film. You know, it's very difficult for these grass-roots filmmakers to put their passion out there, to have their films shown for all to see. And the way films are made had drastically changed, with YouTube footage out there and the fact that everybody has a camera in their back pocket. And I know nothing about it. But in the little bit that I've been involved with Emi (Wind Riders producer and director Emi Katayama), you recognize that that's a big deal for them, and you couldn't be happier for them.

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I put a great amount of energy into supporting the Balloon Museum.”

ATM: In the trailer for the film, a balloonist says in an interview that ‘people get in balloons, and still realize that you can’t steer it.’ His words really illuminate how much uncertainty and thrill there is in ballooning.

NA: Exactly. It goes back to weather. The way you steer in ballooning is through venting and ballast. And that is how really skilled pilots get to have these amazing flights and compete in competitions. But at every altitude, the wind and layers and direction of wind change, so the only way you can maneuver the balloon in flight is by either ascending or descending in altitude.

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The film allowed me to see Richard smiling again.
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ATM: Do you know which way the directions are or do you have to get your balloon to that altitude before you can tell?

NA: If you are flying with other balloons, you can look out at the horizon and see, more or less, the altitude and the direction they’re going. Or you can do the old trick where you spit out of the basket and see which way (your spit) goes. I’m sure every pilot has their own method, but that’s the method that I was taught by Richard.

ATM: Do you find it hard sometimes to be around ballooning because of the accident, or is there comfort there for you?

NA: I think a little bit of both, but a little more the latter. I feel like the ballooning community is an extension of our family. Ballooning was something that Richard loved, it was always such a source of joy and happiness and fond memories in it. And so, I go towards it. Gas ballooning, I haven’t been around it so much. I think that still gets to the pit of my stomach. But I think I would enjoy going to see a gas balloon flight at some point. I also didn’t want it to mar my children’s memory of ballooning and Balloon Fiesta, because it was always such a happy, fun-filled time for them.

ATM: How involved are you with the Balloon Fiesta and the Balloon Museum?

NA: I’m still very involved. I’m the past president of the Board of Trustees for the Balloon Museum. I really support the Museum and all the things that they have going on and are working toward. I put a great amount of energy there. I love to be involved in Balloon Fiesta every year, and I act as their International Ambassador for the international balloon pilots. I do try to keep myself connected in any way that I can and find a balance because it’s a peaceful place for me.

ATM: You attended the premiere of *Wind Riders* at the Manhattan Film Festival this past spring. What emotions did you have in seeing the documentary?

NA: It was really a good experience. Of course, I got to see and relive the passion and hard work that Rich had always put into ballooning, but I also just got to see him smiling again, and be happy and so full of life.

ATM: The film won the festival’s Audience Award for Best Documentary, plus several other awards on the festival circuit this summer. What is the filmmakers next steps with the film?

NA: In speaking to the executive producers, the goal is, and this is the goal for any

filmmaker, to get their documentary out there as much as possible. It’s really all about finding distribution. And so, what I think they are hoping for, and planning for, is to try and connect with those distributors that might be interested in picking it up.

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When it gets difficult, the ballooning family offers hugs and smiles.
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ATM: Have you been up in a balloon since the tragedy?

NA: We have. The kids and I went up in Richard’s hot air balloon maybe a year or two after the accident. It was an eerie feeling, I’m not going to lie. And I don’t think I’ve been up since, not for the fear of it, but I’d rather have someone go up that hasn’t gone up before.

ATM: It sounds like ballooning is still a big part of you, even if it’s just the recreational aspect.

NA: There’s the competitive side to it, and then there’s the hot air ballooning that is so magical and special, and has brought so much joy to our family. So many of the people that I love are a part of ballooning. So, I just continue to walk into it. And when it is difficult, there are enough people around to give a hug or share a smile or to lean on. I think that is what has made the difference for us. ♥