

## ★ SID CUTTER ★

Sid Cutter, co-founder of hot air ballooning in Albuquerque, has reached countless summits in flight since he learned to fly an airplane at age 10. He got his early start from his father, the late William "Bill" Cutter, an aviation pioneer and owner of the city's first flight instruction school.

Cutter's top award to date, ballooning's highest, was the prestigious Diploma Montgolfier. He received it from the Federation Aeronautic Internationale for staging the first two National Hot Air Balloon Championships in Albuquerque in 1973 and 1975.

Historians say the 1973 World Championships, which drew 132 balloons from 14 countries over a 9-day span, established Albuquerque as a mecca for hot air ballooning throughout the world.

Tonight, the 62-year-old Cutter becomes the 60th inductee in the Albuquerque Sports Hall of Fame.

"I've always loved flying, but hot air ballooning has been my life since 1974," said Cutter, who formed World Balloon Corp. that year.

"The story of my very first balloon flight in 1971 has been told many times because it helped found the Kodak Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta a year later. My brother William and I purchased the balloon for my mother, Virginia Dillon Cutter, who celebrated her birthday on June 3.

"Few people know the real story of that first flight. It was wild. Nobody in Albuquerque knew how to fly a balloon, including me. It was supposed to be a tethered flight. The inflated balloon was supposed to hover just outside our Cutter Flying Service hangar at the International Airport."

He said that his crew somehow let go of the rope and Cutter went soaring directly north.

"I was about 300 feet above all those electric light poles on Yale Avenue and stayed aloft more than an hour," he said. "I didn't know how long the fuel would last or even the basics of

a control burn to let the hot air out in landing. I lost contact with my chase crew and the balloon landed in a deep draw in the back nine of the old University North Golf Course."

The historic 1971 balloon his mother named the "Betsy Ross," had a 56,000 cubic foot envelope. It was purchased from Raven Industries in South Dakota.

Cutter and friend Tom Rutherford helped KOB organize the 1972 Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta, then known as the Albuquerque International Coyote and Roadrunner Balloon Race. There were 13 balloons then, an event that escalated in 1996 to nearly 800 balloons.

A Duke City native, Cutter graduated from Albuquerque High School in 1952 where he played football and later in the North-South All-Star Game. He attended UNM for a year and studied mechanical engineering at the University of Alaska for another year before joining the Air Force as a cadet in 1954. He saw duty as a fighter pilot and also was an air transport pilot for the Military Air Transport Service.

Cutter flew his first airplane solo at age 16. He received his private pilot's certificate at 17 and commercial license at 18. He's flown airplanes for 22,000 hours, balloons for 4,500 hours and helicopters for 1,200 hours.

He is a two-time National Balloon champion (1978, 1986) and placed second in the 1979 World Championships in Sweden.

Cutter organized the world's largest hot air balloon club, the Albuquerque Aerostat Ascension Association. It lists 1,900 members including about 600 pilots, he said.

"Sentimentally, I wish we still had my mother's Betsy Ross balloon," he said. "We sold it years ago. It was destroyed in part of a movie sequence in the Bermuda Triangle area."

His company designed, built, tested and exhibited two of the world's largest thermal airships, each containing 229,000 cubic feet of pressurized hot air; larger than the celebrated Goodyear gas airships.