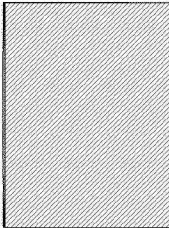
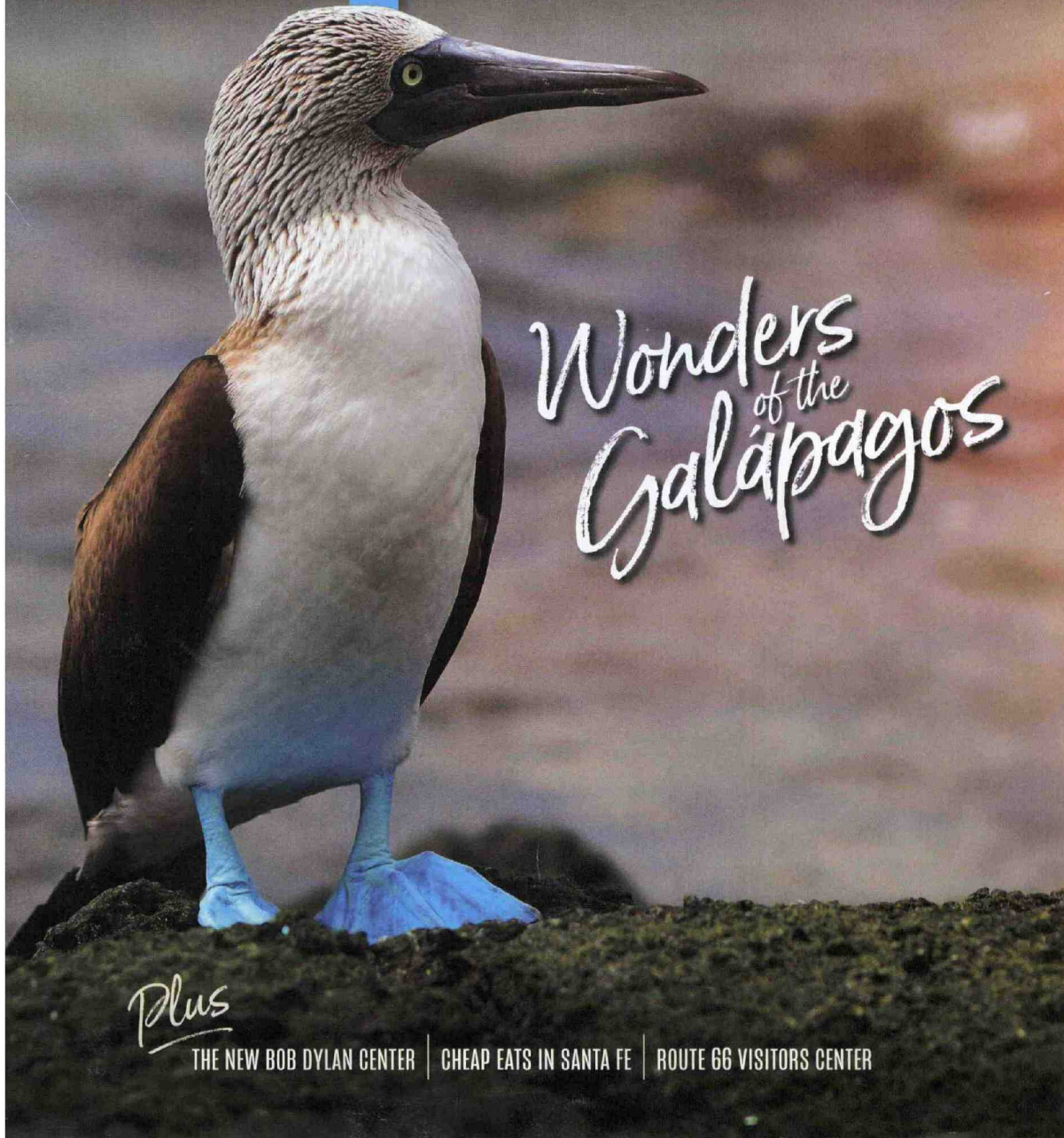


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# AAA Explorer

OCT/NOV/DEC 2022 THE MAGAZINE FOR AAA NEW MEXICO MEMBERS



# Out & About

PLACES TO GO AND THINGS TO SEE, NEAR AND FAR

## Cheers to 50 Years

This fall, legions of volunteers, visitors, and local businesses will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the **Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta**. The festival began modestly in 1972 with just 13 balloons. This year, some 650 balloons will take to the skies. Representatives from the 1972 fiesta will gather for a commemorative launch on September 30 to kick off this year's event, which officially runs from October 1 to 9.

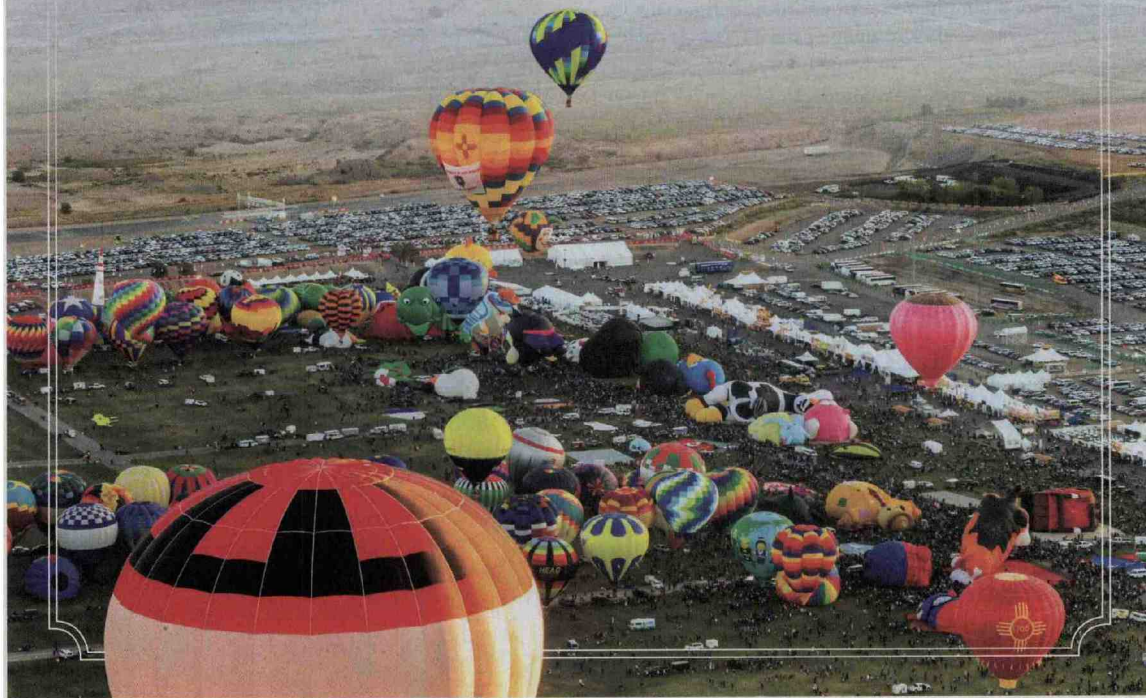
"The color and spectacle of hundreds of balloons in the air at the same time is breathtaking, exciting, and humbling all at once," said Thomas McConnell, who started piloting balloons in 1973 and who has served on the fiesta's board of directors since 1980.

For McConnell's family, like so many others in Albuquerque, the event has blossomed into a multigenerational tradition. His son Tom II now flies the family's balloon, Zia, and the elder McConnell and his wife, Mary, are part of the chase crew. Mary has knitted sweaters bearing the Zia emblem for each family member, adding up to 40 handmade sweaters over the years.

"The real miracle of Balloon Fiesta is that no one feels left out," Thomas said. Admission, \$15. **BY CYNTHIA J. DRAKE**



**Hotel Parq Central's Apothecary Lounge** features a cocktail crafted for this golden anniversary. The Aeronaut (bourbon, Aperol, lemon, and honey, topped with a citrus smoke bubble) mimics the appearance of a balloon floating to the clouds.



ANGELINA PEACE PHOTOS/ALBUQUERQUE INTERNATIONAL BALLOON FIESTA; INSET: COURTESY HOTEL PARQ CENTRAL