



# The Sky's the Limit

Todd Monahan – Owner/Principal Pilot  
**SunKiss Ballooning**

www.sunkissballooning.com • 518 796-0373 • Glens Falls, NY

**SM:** You have felt a deep connection to ballooning since you were young. What was your first experience with it?

*TM: My first experience with ballooning, that I can remember, was when I was five years old. I remember walking around a nearby festival, feeling the warmth of the burner inflating the balloon, and hearing people cheer as they lifted off the ground. Everyone in the basket seemed so happy waving back at the crowd. I lived relatively close to the airport where the festival took place. Most of the time, the balloons would take off and land by my house. I remember riding my bicycle all over, so excited, not knowing which balloon to help pack up.*

**SM:** What did you study while you were at SUNY Oswego?

*TM: While I attended Oswego I studied psychology, and continued getting my Masters in Community Counseling at St. Joseph College in Vermont. I have always wanted to know what makes people do what they do. Sometimes the behavior of people just doesn't make sense to me. So I have always found it intriguing.*

**SM:** What were your career goals at that time?

*TM: My career goal at that time was to be able to help people create low stress lives, which in turn would make them happier. I think people should enjoy life. I don't care how bad someone's life is, that person has to find the strength from within to make it better somehow, someway!*

**SM:** How did ballooning come back into your life after school?

*TM: I remember chasing down the balloons on my bike and that passion could never be forgotten! I graduated from college and started my career in counseling at a local alcohol and drug clinic called Conifer Park. One morning I asked my group what they once had a passion for. I wanted to know what had motivated them, and why they had let it go. I encouraged them to chase that dream; motivation allows people to take pride in some aspect of their life, in return lowering high risk behaviors that will disturb what motivates them. As I was talking to them about this, they encouraged me to chase my dream. It really made me think, and I found that passion again. I went home and immediately researched balloon pilots on the internet. I made phone calls until I was referred to a local pilot. This pilot told me he was flying the weekend coming up and asked me if I wanted to help. He barely got the words out before I said "I'll be there, what time!"*

**SM:** What ultimately prompted your decision to pursue your dreams?

*TM: The first day I started crewing, it was a feeling I can't describe. I get chills just thinking*

*about it. I couldn't walk away from this feeling I had. I got my first ride in 2005 and I knew I just had to do this. I was on a mission after this—I had to get my pilot's license.*

**SM:** You obviously had to go through much training to get your license. What did that process consist of?

*TM: There are a couple ways of going about getting your licenses. I first had to start off by getting my student license, which really just says that I am studying to be a pilot. This is obtained by seeing a designated examiner (DE) and they fill out a card and give it to you. As a student pilot, you can start training from a commercial pilot, and logging hours. Because a commercial pilot usually has a business and brings paid passengers, it is difficult to get their attention one-on-one. With this in mind, I decided to fly to Albuquerque, New Mexico to train. Albuquerque is the ballooning capital of America. They have the largest balloon festival in the world. Their balloon fiesta holds between 800 & 1000 balloons, filling up the sky, and making one heck of a scene. I participated in very intense training for two weeks. I flew in the morning for about 2 hours, and spent another 2-3 hours at my trainer's house for the education piece of my training. I had to take an FAA written exam followed by meeting with a DE for the oral composition. Once I passed both of those, I took my DE for an actual flight test where I was asked to complete several maneuvers with the balloon. This was for my private license. I had to do this all over again, with a different series of more detailed questions to get my commercial license.*

**SM:** Where did you complete your training program?

*TM: I received my private license in Albuquerque, New Mexico and my commercial license in Glens Falls, NY.*

**SM:** How did you end up in Glens Falls?

*TM: I am originally from Hudson Falls. When I got out of college, I bought*

*a duplex and owned my house in Glens Falls.*

**SM:** How were you able to finance SunKiss Ballooning? Did you have a business plan?

*TM: I wouldn't say a professional business plan. My business plan was basically, as long as this could pay for itself, I would be happy. I sit down each year and determine my budgets for spending, understanding my limits with the business. When I started, I had to ask for some financial help outside of myself or the business. I had a private investor who I reached out to.*

**SM:** How many people can fly at one time?

*TM: Myself plus 4 other passengers.*

**SM:** How long do your flights last?

*TM: From the time we meet to the time I bring you back to your pick up area is 3 hours, the actual flight is 40-60 minutes, depending on the landing areas.*

**SM:** What is the best way to make a reservation, and how far in advance should it be done?

*TM: The best way to make a reservation is to call me at 518-796-0373; this is my personal cell phone and business phone. The passengers will talk to their very own pilot. This gives them the option to ask any questions they may have. When a passenger calls, we schedule a flight by picking a day they would like to go, along with a back-up day, just in case the weather won't allow us to take the flight.*

**SM:** What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?

*TM: I get to give this wonderful experience to other people, while fulfilling my childhood dream.*

**SM:** Is SunKiss Ballooning a seasonal business?

*TM: For the most part, it is. We do the majority of our business from May to October. We also fly in the winter, for fun and for the view. I also participate in special events over the winter, like carnivals and parades.*

**SM:** What types of package options do you offer?

**TM:** I offer a couple of different packages starting at \$195.

- Bronze Package (\$195) -- 30-40 minute ride w/ champagne toast
- Silver Package (\$210) -- 40-60 minute ride with champagne toast and food
- Gold Package (\$225) -- 40-60 minute ride, champagne toast, food, & t-shirt
- Platinum Package (\$300) -- 0-60 minute ride, champagne toast, food, t-shirt, 2 4x6 framed photos and an 8x10 framed photo.

**SM:** Do you do any special occasions or events?

**TM:** We do all kinds of special events. If you can think of it, we can do it. Proposals are the most popular, then weddings. Birthdays are popular events as well. We take a lot of people who are interested in photography, especially in the fall when the leaves are changing. We also do a number of grand openings for hotels or other new businesses.

**SM:** When is the best time of day to fly?

**TM:** The best time to fly is either early in the morning, or later on in the evening. This is because winds are caused by the heating

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of the earth. So, as the day goes on and the earth warms up, the winds are more common throughout the middle of the day. The scenery is also so much nicer when watching the sun rise or set.

**SM:** You believe in giving back to your community. Why is this so important to you?

**TM:** Communities once helped each other out. Everyone knew everyone else in the town. Today, that is rare. I try to get to know people in my community, and I try my best to be as nice as possible. I try to give back to those who are less fortunate, or who may be struggling in some way. We should care about the community we live in – take pride in it!

**SM:** What are some of the charities or organizations that you are affiliated with?

**TM:** I have participated in the building of the Whitehall playground for their community, MS Foundations with “Loopers for Lisa,” the Winter Carnival in Lake George, Caritas

Foundation, United Way, and several different cancer benefits.

**SM:** What do you hope for the future of SunKiss Ballooning?

**TM:** I hope to someday be one of the best balloon pilots out there. I would like to have the opportunity to work with and learn from the most experienced pilots. I hope SunKiss Ballooning works it way across the United States and to other countries. I hope the business acquires some special shape balloons as a major attraction to festivals across the world.

**SM:** What accomplishment are you most proud of?

**TM:** Being 27 and working diligently to own a home, car, and business vehicle, working full time helping adolescents, and owning my very own business. I am extremely proud to have a family that is willing to support me in chasing my dream!

518-796-0373

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