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Fran's team created this balloon anchor for a nautical-themed party.

Up, up and away:

Entrepreneur Fran Kades rises in her field

By Leni Reiss

When I visited with Fran Kades in her Scottsdale home, she had just returned from a world balloon convention in New Orleans attended by representatives from some 53 countries. Founder and owner of the Valley-based The Balloon People, Fran says that consumers might tend to think of balloon décor as balloons tied with ribbon or animals made from balloons. "In fact, she says, "The field has become very sophisticated." She shares with me a 400-page catalog from the convention that "inspires innovation – from simple to spectacular."

Born and raised in Johannesburg, South Africa, Fran came to the United States at age 20 and worked for 11 years in Los Angeles as a paralegal. She says she always felt that she would live in the States someday. "I felt like an American from day one," she says, "but I can't deny my accent!"

"My team and I want our hosts and their guests to be wowed – and our aim is to give them the biggest bang for their buck, to provide the best time of their lives."

– Fran Kades

"I started out as a receptionist," Fran recalls, "but my boss evidently thought I was smart, and trained me on the job." But the 1994 earthquake was the impetus for Fran and her then-husband to move to the Valley. Their children, Sydney and Josh, were born here. "We had visited on occasion and when we looked into it, the homes were so reasonable in comparison to L.A. that we made the move."

The Balloon People was launched shortly after the move, when Fran, on the hunt for a new challenge, went with high hopes to a franchise show. She signed up for a one-day balloon training session, was hooked, and purchased a helium tank. (She recalls with a smile that a former boyfriend used to send her balloon bouquets "for all occasions and for no occasions – and they always made me happy.")



Fran Kades uses balloons and neon-lit centerpieces to turn a celebration into Candyland.

Coming from a Jewishly-connected family in Johannesburg, Fran already had made social inroads locally and her first “big job” was one of the major social events of seasons past: the Kivel Ball. She ruefully recalls that although she had donated both her time and the materials, “it was not a great success.” The balloon columns, she says, were black and white and beautiful – “but it was a windy night and I didn’t know that they should have been weighted – and they just fell over. Whoops!”

At the time, it took Fran about an hour to create one column. Now she can do six of them in the same time frame – and she says she always weights them “wind or no wind!” She says she was devastated by the Kivel fiasco, but the experience was the catalyst for her to “really get serious,” to earn her credentials as a certified balloon artist, invest in the highest quality equipment and products and to consistently learn from other professionals.

Since then Fran has branched out and often assumes the role of party planner, coordinating colors, centerpieces, linens, venues, invitations and more, typically with a balloon element. She collaborates with graphic artists and printers to service individuals, families, private parties, corporate events – any and all simchas and celebrations.

Her projects run the gamut from elaborate to reasonably priced. “My team and I want our hosts and their guests to be wowed – and our aim is to give them the biggest bang for their

buck, to provide the best time of their lives. A party shouldn’t be successful based on how much you spend; it should be based on the people who have come together to share in the celebration.”

The Balloon People released hundreds of balloons in team colors for the Super Bowl pre-game festivities at Arizona State University in Tempe in 1996. They typically arrange between 15 to 20 New Year’s Eve balloon drops at hotels and casinos all over town.

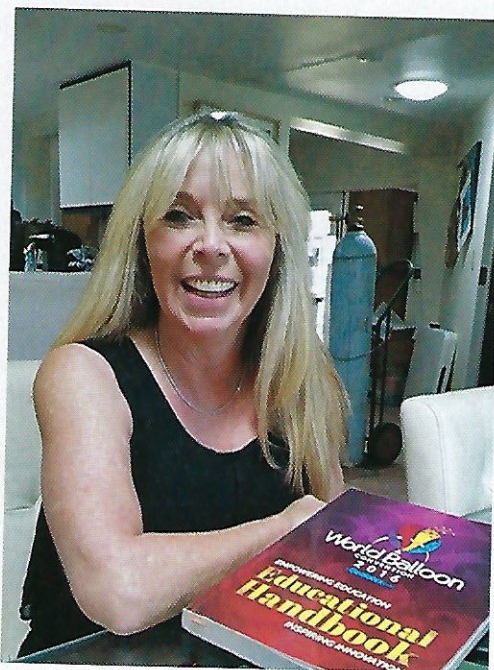
Columns, arches and names spelled out in balloons always are popular. Centerpieces can be balloons topped by strings of lights or enchanted bubbles, which are balloons filled with smaller

balloons. Fran also has crafted musical instruments out of wire and covered them with neon, which then are set on revolving turntables. A new concept is custom-lit lampshades decorated with photos or logos.

One of her most ambitious and challenging jobs to date was for a national business conference this past winter at a local hotel. The firm traditionally rewards top salespeople with Rolex timepieces. This year there were 21 winners and it was Fran’s charge to create balloon devices (with watches inside) that would unroll simultaneously, from the ballroom ceiling, over the heads of the winners who could reach up and claim their prize.

“It was traumatic, but the most fun ever,” Fran says.

To reach The Balloon People for more information visit the balloonpeople.net or call 602-359-2238.



Fran Kades