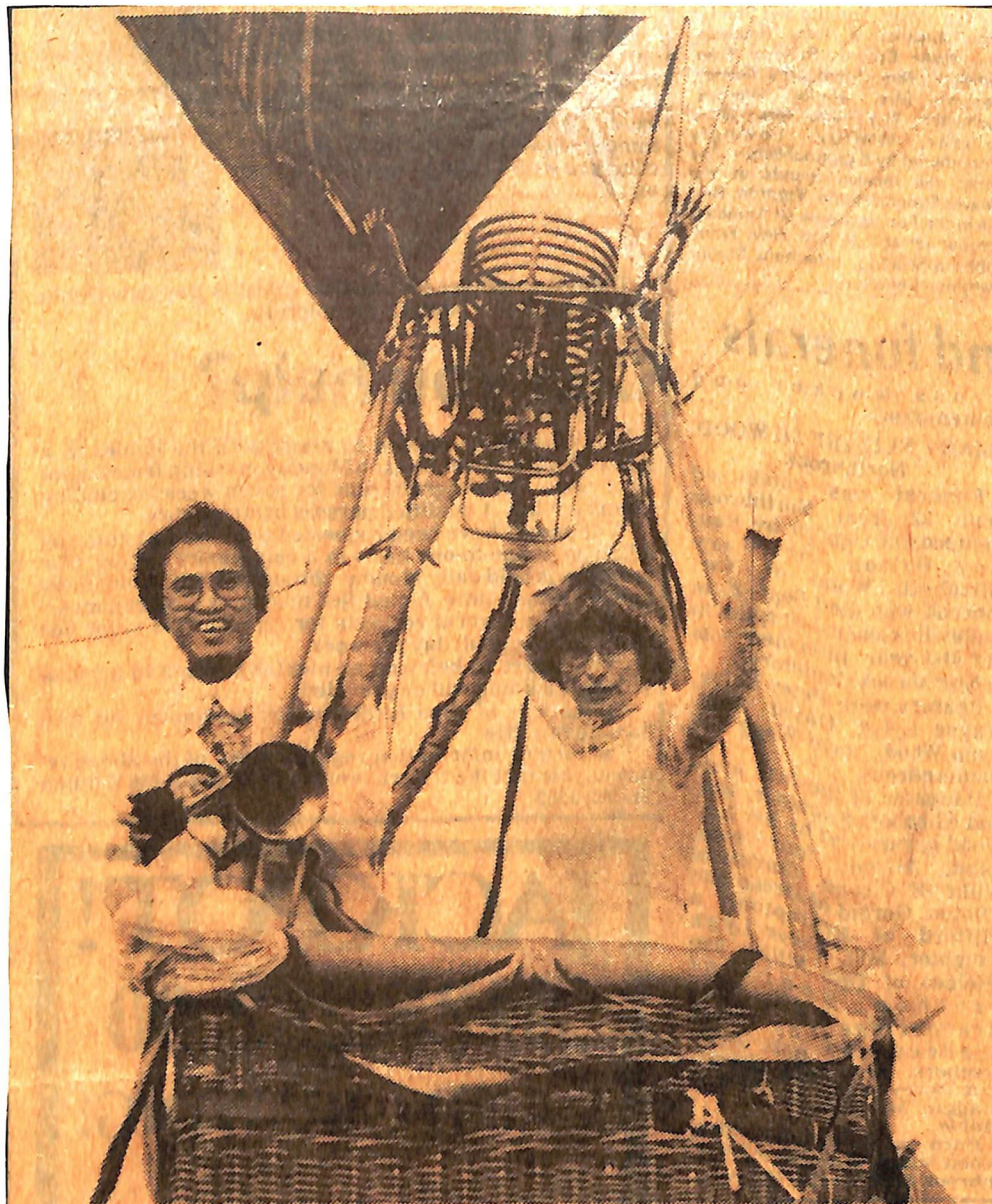


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Dan Choi and Donna Fano took-off into their lives of matrimony Saturday in a hot-air balloon, north of Belleville.

Couple uses balloon to launch marriage

By RON HIUSER
Staff Reporter

HALLOWAY - Donna Fano and Dan Choi were literally launched into their marriage Saturday.

After taking their vows in a farm field east of this hamlet, the couple drifted away in a wicker basket suspended from an 80 by 60 foot hot air balloon.

Waving to their families as the 77,500 cubic foot balloon rose from the cleared farm field of Chris Pleizier, about 3.2 km east of here, the couple landed about 30 minutes later and popped bottles of champagne for the wedding party and guests.

Donna who received her hot-air balloon flying licence earlier this year noted it is traditional for champagne to be shared when a balloon lands. But in this case, the champagne represents more than a tradition, it is a way for the couple to share their joy with the family and friends, she explained.

The groom admitted he was apprehensive about leaving the wedding in a balloon, but eventually decided the experience would be something different. "There was one in Calgary, so we're not

the first in Canada," but possibly in Ontario, the bride commented.

She noted none of her friends had any negative comments about the wedding send-off when they were told. They thought it was "a great idea...instead of decorating a car they decorated a balloon."

Donna's parents who flew from Hanna, Alta. (on an airplane), said they initially tried to talk their daughter out of the balloon plans but her wishes prevailed. "I thought it would be a little too dangerous," said David Fano, the bride's father, "but she was determined and she did." He said, "we'll probably be up (in the balloon) next week, if there isn't too big of a line-up."

The balloon is owned by Donna and two friends who formed the Toronto Balloon Club earlier this year.

Conducting the wedding was city minister, Rev. Clifford Parkes of the United Church. He said he didn't have any reservations about the couple leaving in the balloon.

Following their balloon ride, the couple had a reception in Belleville before leaving on their honeymoon in the more traditional fashion of a car. The couple will reside in Belleville.