

Marriages are born in ballooners' heaven

By BRUCE STAPLEY

In 1783, a hot air balloon took to the skies in Paris, France — man's first-ever aviation experience.

More than 200 years later, the "Sport of Kings" as ballooning came to be known, is much more advanced, very popular, and a great way to propose to your fiancée.

"We are always being approached by people who want their engagement to take place in a balloon," says Hugh Wallis, who together with wife Flora MacDonald, operate Cameron Balloons in Stouffville.

In addition to taking their awe struck customers on more than 500 balloon rides since going into business full-time in 1985, Flora and Hugh distribute balloons, acting as representatives for the British-based Cameron Balloon firm.

"Cameron Balloons will build balloons in any shape," says Flora, referring to a brochure which features hot air models in the shape of gas pumps, spark plugs, paint cans, and even blue jeans. Flora's own favorite is formed like a pumpkin.

Nothing compares

"The sensation provided by climbing into the big wicker basket and lifting skyward just doesn't compare to any other experience," says Hugh.

"The response is always one of 'Wow,'" he explains. "We've never had anyone disappointed. Some are nervous at first, but they always get over it quickly."

Hugh adds the "oneness" with nature is extremely peaceful and calming. "It's the one form of flying where you're able to reach out and touch the air."

Flight paths are always

prearranged, being determined by wind direction.

Starting points are either Stouffville, Mt. Albert, Newmarket or the Uxbridge area.

Flights last from between an hour and an hour-and-a-half, covering a distance of five to 20 miles depending on wind speed. If weather conditions aren't favorable, the flight is rescheduled.

Each one unique

"Every flight has something unique, something different," says Hugh. "There are so many different routes, different topography."

"Sometimes we'll see deer, hawks, ponds and rivers. We once flew over an eagle's nest, which made the mother more than a little excited," Hugh continued.

As for the claim balloonists disturb farm animals, Hugh is quick to point out his people go to great lengths to insure animals or farmers are not upset. They use special noiseless burners when going over animal areas.

"It is very important to show respect for farmers and livestock," Flora insists. "We've never encountered any problems with farmers."

Hugh and Flora claim to enjoy their customers as much as the customers enjoy the balloon rides.

Different reasons

"Every passenger we have flown has been an absolute delight," Hugh says. "And they all have different reasons for wanting to try it."

Flora refers to the little old lady who had promised herself she would take a balloon ride before she died.

People give balloon rides to

friends or relatives for birthday presents, anniversary presents or just for surprises for a spouse.

Hugh even took a couple up into the sky to get married last August. "There was a minister onboard," he says. "And not only was I the pilot, but I was the second witness and I actually ended up signing as such."

Other requests included a man from Ballantrae who flew with his girlfriend over the man's house, where he had spelled out the words "Marry Me Kate" in the snow with logs. And then there was the man who had his entire street watch him take off.

Why do it?

What compels people to want to experience lifting gently skyward in a wicker basket, hooked up to a synthetic fabric envelope with propane powered steel burners?

"Usually, someone else told them about it or they saw it on television," Hugh says. "They're from all walks of life. Sometimes they've been thinking about trying it for months and for others it's totally spur of the moment."

The "Champagne Flights" as they are called, can carry up to 10 people. Upon landing, usually in an open field, the "chase" truck collects the balloon and the passengers and heads back to the starting point where champagne is actually served.

Beside Hugh and Flora, Cameron Balloons also employs the services of another full-time pilot and has several part-time employees.

Off to Calgary

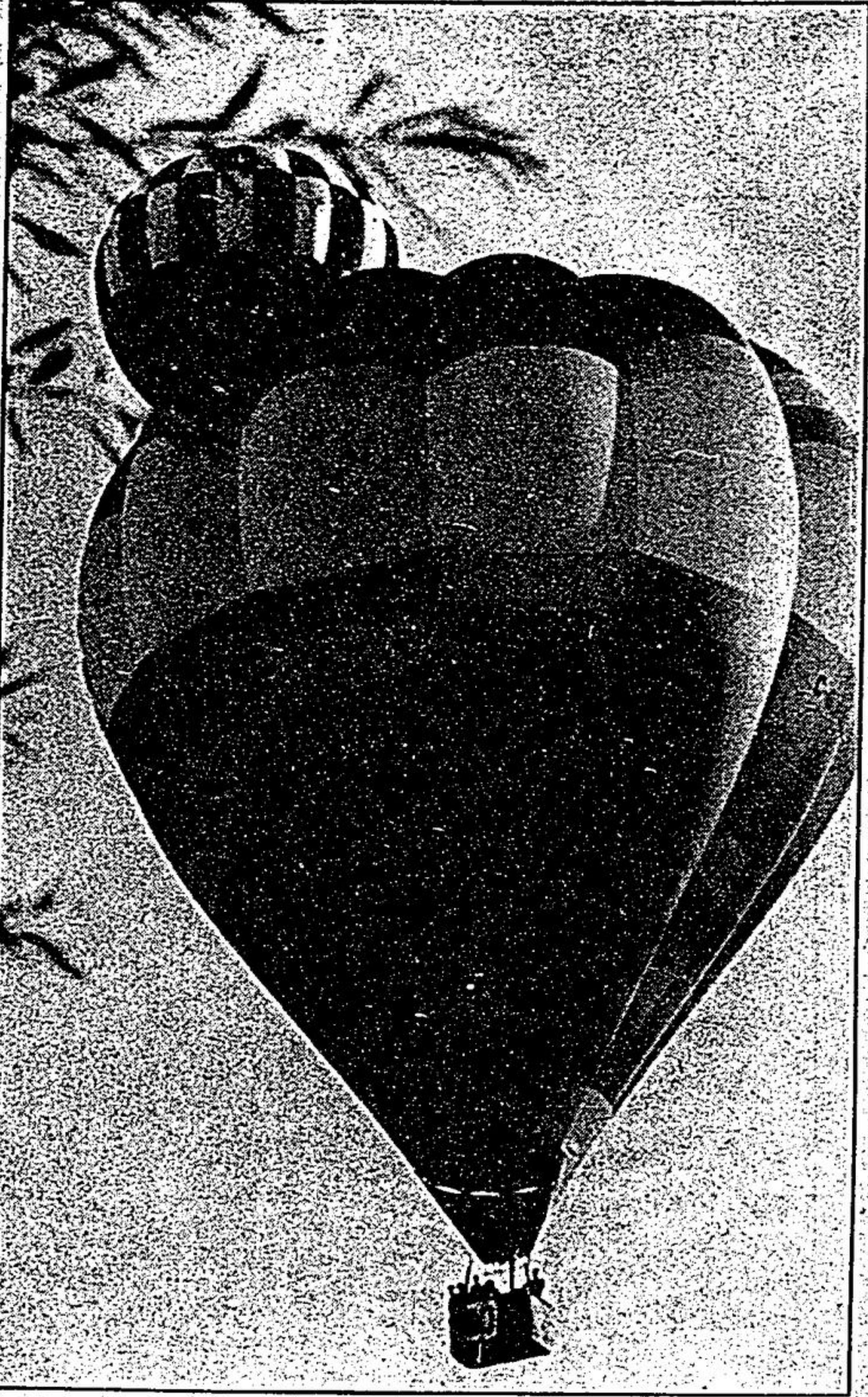
Hugh will be taking two balloons to Calgary, Alberta, to

participate in the Olympic Balloon Festival. In Calgary, passengers will fly over the city in balloons from all over Canada.

As for Hugh Wallis and Flora MacDonald, they've come to cherish the day they encoun-

tered each other ballooning in 1981, landing in the same field in Sandford.

The resulting partnership in both marriage and business has proved to be an "uplifting" experience.



Cameron Balloon owners, Flora MacDonald and Hugh Wallace met when they landed balloons in the same field. It's been uplifting ever since.

Have your say:

Is it fair to expect Grade 8 students to choose high school subjects and subject levels at so early an age?



NATALIE WOOD
Grade 8
Summitview P.S.

"Yes, I think it's fair. We should be able to choose our own subjects and subject levels. We can obtain help from our parents and from our teachers in the decision-making process. They can assist us in deciding our futures."



LESLIE PENNY
Grade 8
Summitview P.S.

"Yes, we can decide now because most of us already know our own abilities and what we can achieve. We're well aware of what we're taking."



TIM STRATTON
Grade 8
Orchard Park P.S.

"I think it's a good idea. If the decision's left too late, you don't have enough time to prepare yourself for a job or for university. It's good to have your parents' help when making the decision."



STACEY WOOLFORD
Grade 8
Orchard Park P.S.

"Yes, it's a good idea. It gives us more time to decide what we will do with our future. Preparing early gives us an opportunity to speak with our parents. They can help us decide."