

High-flying dreams



Photos by Jack Kurtz/The Arizona Republic

The airship Ameriquest Soaring Dreams is part of an art project in Arizona, Texas, New Mexico and California. Children in after-school programs and hospitals helped paint the balloon.

Glendale kids helped paint inspirational airship

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The Arizona Republic

Few children get to see their artistic creations float high in the sky.

But that became a reality for 12-year-old Shayavanti Miles of Glendale, who was among 5,000 children nationwide who helped paint the 40,000-square-foot canvas that envelops the Ameriquest Soaring Dreams Airship.

About 50 children from the Glenn F. Burton Elementary School's Glendale Enrichment Opportunity after-school program were invited to help paint the balloon, which is larger than the famed

Goodyear Blimp.

"I think that blimp was really big," Shayavanti said. "Only one little bit of it, the blue part, took up our whole cafeteria. I feel lucky that our school was picked."

The event has excited Shayavanti, and she thinks she wants to be a professional artist.

After resting briefly in the Valley last week, the airship headed for Texas and then to California. The ship kicked off its tour in early April at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles.

The project allowed children in after-



Capt. Jose Bernaola checks out an engine that powers the Ameriquest Soaring Dreams.

AIRSHIP Art project launches dreams

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school programs and hospitals in Arizona, Texas, New Mexico and California to take part in painting the mammoth balloon. It is heralded as the world's largest piece of moving art.

The colorful canvas has a surface area more than five times the size of the Sistine Chapel ceiling and the equivalent of four DC-3 passenger planes and seven professional basketball courts.

Glendale's Junior Abril also helped paint the balloon.

"It was just huge," said Junior, 10. I think it's cool that it made history. I think it's cool that they picked us out of all the schools."

He liked painting the balloon in one of his favorite colors, blue.

"I think it's exciting that it flew in the air," Junior said.

The project is a partnership between Portraits of Hope and Ameriquest Mortgage Co. Portraits of Hope is a program that conceives and develops creative projects that merge the healing arts with inspirational public art. Ameriquest is one of the nation's largest mortgage lenders.

The youngsters painted panels that are draped on the sides of the airship. The airship does



Jack Kurtz/The Arizona Republic

The Ameriquest Soaring Dreams can carry eight passengers and has a two-person flight crew.

not have a skeleton, which is what allowed the dirigibles of the early 20th century to keep their shapes. Instead it keeps its shape with helium. It is filled with 240,000 cubic feet of helium, which Capt. Jose Bernaola said "is enough helium to talk funny for a lifetime."

Bernaola likens flying in an airship to floating or to sailing on a sailboat. He said you ride the air, not through the air, like you do in an airplane.

The airship, Ameriquest Soaring Dreams, moored at Williams Gateway Airport in Mesa one morning last week. The airship normally cruises at about 45 mph and at 1,000 to 2,000 feet above the ground.

It can carry eight passengers in a first-class seating configuration and has a two-person flight crew (captain and first officer). It has a ground support crew of 18.

The airship has as much in-

strumentation as any modern airplane and includes two radios and two sets of radar (one of which is weather radar).

The art program is aimed at brightening and enriching the lives of children and adults, many of whom may be coping with hardships, emotional or physical trauma, or serious illness.

Portraits of Hope was founded in 1995 by Ed Massey and Bernie Massey, continuing their use of art and visual imagery for large-scale projects of social consequence. Initially developed as a creative therapy program for seriously ill and physically disabled youth, Portraits of Hope has evolved to include a diverse group of children and adults from various community programs and institutions.

"This is an opportunity for the unimaginable to become reality," Ed Massey said. "This program encourages children to reach as high as their imaginations will allow, to be part of something bigger than themselves, and to be a part of history. It's a wonderful chance for these youngsters to be celebrated all across the country and the world."

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