

# Youth

THE EUREKA REPORTER Friday, July 15, 2005



Pilot Corky Belanger Jr. stands in front of the Ameriquet Soaring Dreams Airship while it is tied down at the Eureka-Arcata Airport in McKinleyville on Wednesday. Diane M. Batley/The Eureka Reporter

## It's a bird, it's a plane - no, it's a blimp

By DIANE M. BATLEY, THE EUREKA REPORTER

It's on a nationwide tour to inspire children to aim high with their goals and dreams. ♦ The Ameriquet Soaring Dreams Airship landed in Humboldt County this week to provide some of that inspiration locally. ♦ "We're trying to teach them to dream big, think big and achieve big," said Julie Brandt, senior vice president of philanthropy at Ameriquet Mortgage Company, located in Los Angeles. ♦ Ameriquet Mortgage Company and Portraits of Hope helped make it possible for more than 5,000 children in afterschool programs and hospitals to create painted decals that cover the 40,000-square-foot blimp. ♦ The 400 to 500 decals covering the blimp were hand painted by the children, said pilot Corky Belanger, Jr. of Connecticut-based Airship Management Services. ♦ "These shapes that they created were actually wrapped around the airship to create a huge collage," Brandt said.

♦ See **BLIMP**, page B7

# Blimp

◆ CONTINUED FROM  
PAGE B8

Every child who participated signed their name on the panel they painted and Portraits of Hope created and patented certain types of paint brushes to help children with all types of disabilities be able to paint, she said.

“They essentially get to leave their autograph on this flying masterpiece,” Brandt said. “It’s literally making aviation history.”

The 200-foot-long, 65-foot-tall blimp left Santa Rosa before being spotted flying above Eureka Tuesday and tying down at Eureka-Arcata Airport in McKinleyville on Wednesday.

The stop in McKinleyville was not planned, but it is normal to make unexpected stops during this nationwide tour, said Pilot Bart Van Beest.

There are three pilots and 17 crew members traveling with or following the blimp on the road while the nationwide tour is occurring. The blimp carries eight people, Belanger said.

Seattle is the next planned stop for the blimp, then back to Los Angeles, followed by a trip to the East Coast.

“Portraits of Hope conceives and develops wonderfully creative national and international projects that merge the healing arts with inspirational public art,” according to [www.portraitsofhope.org](http://www.portraitsofhope.org). “The program is aimed at brightening and enriching the lives of children and adults of all ages — many of whom may be coping with adversity, hardship, emotional or physical trauma or serious illness — through their participation in incredible, one-of-a-kind projects.”

Ameriquet Soaring Dreams is the “mortgage company’s national philanthropic initiative announced in connection with the launch of the airship,” according to a news release. “It will include national programs to encourage financial literacy and support expanded homeownership, local community outreach projects, as well as national partnerships and investments to support youth development through tutoring, mentoring and academic opportunities.”

For more information, visit [www.portraitsofhope.org](http://www.portraitsofhope.org), [www.soaringdreams.org](http://www.soaringdreams.org) or [www.ameriquet.com](http://www.ameriquet.com).

(Christine Bensen contributed to this story.)