

BALLOONS OVER VERMILION

Festival distributes \$150,000 to local groups

By DAVE HINTON

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DANVILLE — Children and families are a major focus of Balloons Over Vermilion, with annual proceeds benefiting programs across Vermilion County.

That again was borne out Tuesday when \$85,000 of \$150,000 handed out went to 15 local charities and organizations that have youth- and family-focused initiatives. The ceremony was held at Danville's Fischer Theatre.

"When we brought back Balloons over Vermilion, it was with the intent for making it for all of the children who haven't had the amazement of seeing the hundreds of balloons flying en masse," said festival organizer Cassie Keister. "With that, every year we invite a different third- or fourth-grade class to serve as a host student ambassador class."

A class from Rossville-Alvin served in the role the last two years. The class didn't get to serve in 2020 due to the pandemic, so it got a do-over last year.

The class is "our ambassadors and our grand marshals for the parade of pilots," Keister said. "They learn about the sport of hot-air ballooning during the year. They get a sneak peek at balloon school to learn about hot-air bal-



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loon when weather permits. They get to do special arts projects." Kids Zone Chair Jaclyn Vinson announced this year's student ambassador class — Abby Carlton's third-graders from Garfield Elementary School in

Danville.

The remaining \$65,000 awarded Tuesday was presented to the Bobette Steely Hegeler Cancer Care Center "as a demonstration of our commitment to our partnership with OSF" Healthcare Foundation, event Co-Chair Pat O'Shaughnessy said.

This year's festival will be held July 8 and 9 at the Vermilion Regional Airport, Danville.

While the festival marked its fifth year in 2021, it also held Vermilion County's holiday kickoff event, the Festival of Trees.

The transition began in late 2020 through an agreement with OSF. Balloons Over Vermilion officials also committed to provide funding for OSF Sacred Heart Medical Center priorities the next five years.

"In combining the proceeds for both BOV and Festival of Trees, we hope to be a significant source of charitable funding each year for local organizations focused on enriching the lives of Vermilion County young people and their families," said Jim Anderson, event co-chair.

OSF Sacred Heart Medical Center President Ned Hill accepted the award on behalf of the cancer center.