# Balloon fest to put special emphasis on freedom

## New run, bike ride will honor service of military members

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The Purple People Eater will make an appearance at this year's Greenville Hospital System Freedom Weekend Aloft festival.

With bulging eyes, green ears and eyebrows and six dangling arms hanging from a purple hot-air balloon, the balloon will stand out among 80-100 hot-air balloons coming to Simpsonville for the annual Memorial Day Weekend festival.

Organizers called it a "whimsical" hot-air balloon and hope it will help draw a crowd, expected to top 175,000 for the four-day festival May 28-May 31.

Organizers have announced new events and a new chosen charity that the nonprofit festival will seek to raise funds for when it returns to Simpsonville's Heritage Park for a fourth straight year.

New events are geared toward bringing a spirit of thankfulness toward veterans who have served or are serving in the military.

Greenville Hospital System will sponsor a Freedom 5K at 5 p.m., Saturday, May 29, and a 25-mile or 65-mile Freedom Ride at 10 a.m., Sunday, May 30. Participants are encouraged to walk, run or ride in honor of friends or family members who have served or are serving in the military, said Keri Hall, executive director of Freedom Weekend Aloft.



GWINN DAVIS / Staff

Freedom Weekend Aloft Executive Director Keri Hall shows off the Purple People Eater Balloon.

**YOU CAN GO**
For more information, visit www.freedomweekend.org.

"What Memorial Day is all about is remembering our veterans and those who have served our nation, and I can tell you that these events are sure to become signature events and provide a great way for us to collectively show our appreciation to all of those who have served in the military," said Simpsonville Mayor Dennis Waldrop, who chairs the FWA board.

This year, event proceeds will be donated to the Upstate Community Abilities Network at the GHS Roger C. Peace Hospital-Rehabilitation.

UCAN provides adaptive equipment to those who have disabilities that can help them participate in sports, including hand cycling, golf and running, said Stan Healy, administrator of the Roger C. Peace Hospital-Rehabilitation.

"We are here to participate in FWA and to show the community that no matter what a person's disability is, there is an adaptive method for performing almost any activity," Healy said.

UCAN will provide onsite demonstrations of adaptive equipment and will host a baseball tournament for those with mental or physical disabilities during FWA as well as a presentation for Wounded Warriors on Memorial Day.

FWA has already announced acts to play at amphitheater concerts throughout the weekend, including Corey Smith, Joey+Rory, Luke Bryan, The Wailers, Edgar Winter and Blues Traveler. Added to that will be 1964 The Tribute, a top Beatles tribute band; Blue Dogs, a Charleston-based band; and Simpsonville blues musician Mac Arnold with his band Plate Full O' Blues.

In addition, the U.S. Naval Fleet Forces Band and the Four Star Naval Band will return for a second year for concerts on Memorial Day.

Advance tickets are on sale at area Bi-Lo grocery stores for $5 through the end of April, and for $7.50 during May. Tickets will cost $10 at the gate.