

BUSINESS

Balloon Man arrives in Canyon Lake with larger-than-life balloon sculptures

He's not your average balloon decorator.

By **Catherine Wilson**

Updated June 25, 2023 8:18 p.m.



To celebrate the grand opening of its new store front, Balloon Man created a hot air balloon made up of roughly 300 balloons.
Courtesy of Balloon Man

Whenever someone asks Bill Allen what he does for a living the answer is always the same – he's in the balloon business. It's not the kind of business one hears about very often and the response is normally greeted by interest along with the assumption he pilots hot air balloons. The truth is that the closest Allen has ever gotten to a hot air balloon is using hundreds of air-filled balloons to build a 15-foot tall hot air balloon sculpture in honor of the common mistake.

Allen is none other than the Balloon Man – using his design and creativity skills to breathe life into large-scale balloon masterpieces that bring joy to everyone who still believes something as simple as a balloon can bring a smile to someone's face.

However, Balloon Man is more than a man, it's the name of his business, which is making waves in the Hill Country for taking ordinary balloon arches and turning them on their heads. Lately, Balloon Man has taken on more challenging projects, creating structures resembling everything from a sneaker to a depiction of a scene straight out of a classic side scroller Mario game for a church's vacation Bible school program.



Balloon Man goes all out to create a massive balloon installation at Main Plaza in New Braunfels.
Courtesy of Balloon Man

"[Mario] was the first game that I got on the Nintendo," Allen said. "I knew the kids were going to enjoy it and I knew it was going to give the adults in the room [that sense of nostalgia]."



Balloon Man created a scene straight out of Mario for a church's vacation bible school program.
Courtesy of Balloon Man

The family-owned balloon business, which operates out of the New Braunfels area and serves areas across the state, just took its next step by opening a store front in Canyon Lake, located just a mile up from their previous shop in New Braunfels. The family celebrated the achievement with a large celebration on Saturday, June 17, which featured the gigantic hot air balloon.

Origin of Balloon Man

Allen wasn't always the Balloon Man. He started off as a musician, using his gift of music to make people happy, which is where his true passion lies. It was his connection to music that started him on the path to ballooning.

In 2012, Allen approached a former bandmate who was a balloon decorator looking to leave the business. Allen saw an opportunity to break into the business and purchased the accounts, which consisted mostly of car dealerships across Texas and into Oklahoma. For nearly nine years the Balloon Man and his team thrived creating balloon arches for dealerships. Then COVID-19 hit and everything changed.

"When COVID happened ... we had to switch gears and kind of figure out something else," Allen told MySA. "I went ahead and started doing private parties, and that has blown up quite a bit."

While the team of balloon artists were still hard at work creating colorful arches and balloon walls, Allen began branching out and channeling his creativity into taking on commissions from businesses such as Dunkin' Donuts, Boot Barn, and Amazon, who requested an oversized sneaker made up of 800 balloons.

Behind the scenes

For Allen, balloons are an art form. After sitting down with a client to discuss options and budgets, it takes several hours for Allen to plan out and design his masterpieces. He often pulls inspiration from other balloon decorators and puts his own spin on it.

"I'm able to look at a picture of something that somebody else did ... and always try to make it better than the one that I saw, or better than what we've done before," Allen said.

Once the design is complete, his team sets out to work bringing the design to life. While the balloon creators have arches down to a science, it takes the team days and balloons by the hundreds to knock out some of the larger sculptures. After the sculptures are complete, they are loaded on to delivery trailers and assembled on the spot.

Amazon wanted a large sneaker balloon sculpture from Balloon Man. Courtesy of Balloon Man

One of Balloon Man's latest projects took center stage at Wein & Saengerfest in New Braunfels last month. The ambitious team managed to construct and set up a large display right in the middle of downtown. Across from Main Plaza sat a 15 foot guitar, several cactuses, a wine bottle accompanied by a glass of wine, and two music notes. The display was a hit, drawing attention from spectators before they had even finished setting up.

"I gauge [the success] of our designs by how many pictures people take," the Balloon Man said. "If we knock it out of the park, there's going to be people in front of it taking pictures constantly, and that's how it was. Every time I turned around, somebody was taking a picture."

Community impact

Allen is grateful for the support of the community and how the business has been received over the last few years. With the growth and success of Balloon Man, Allen has been making room for more opportunities to give back to the community in the only way he knows how — balloons.

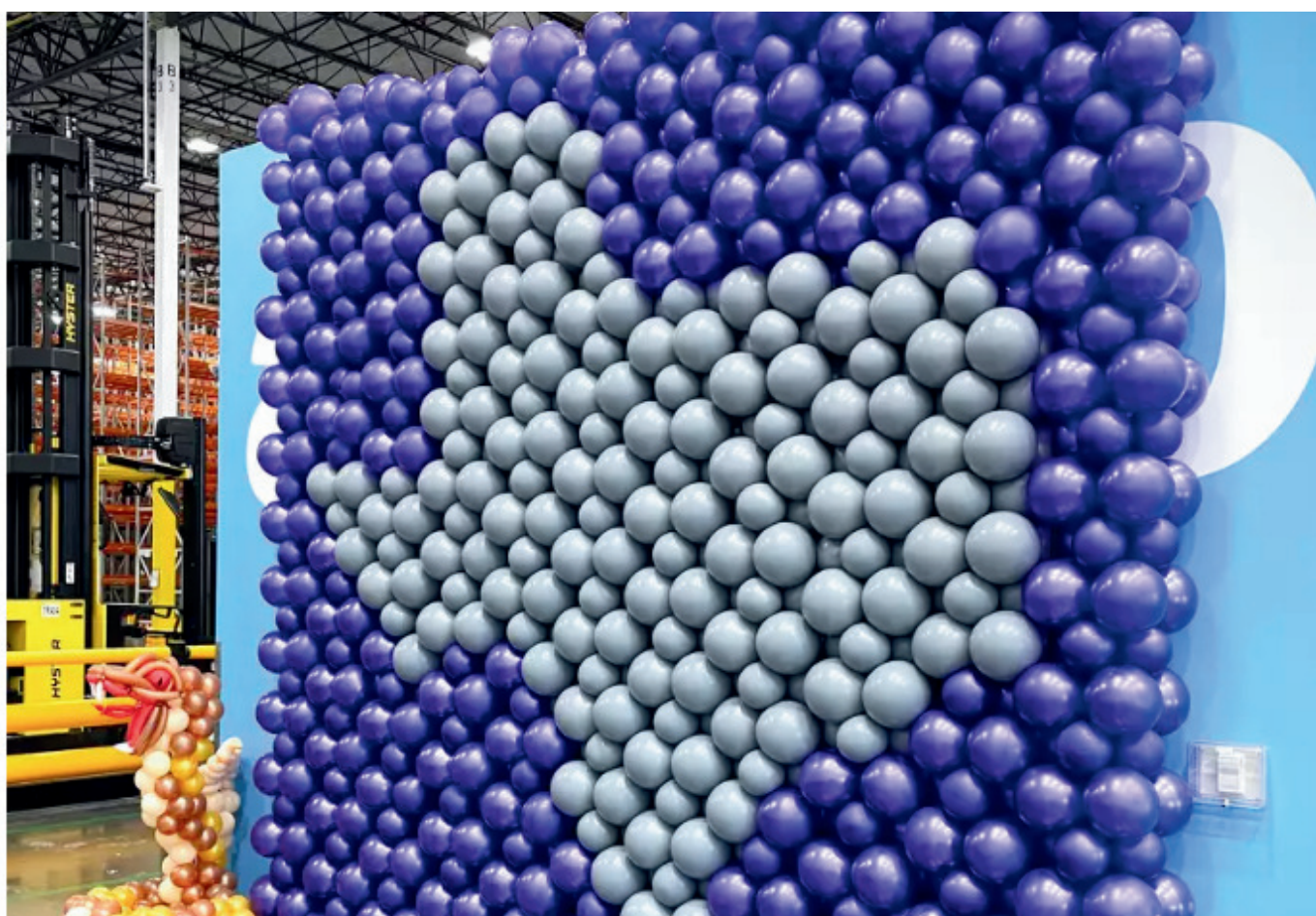


The team assembled a huge installation at Main Plaza in New Braunfels. Courtesy of Balloon Man

Recently, Balloon Man donated balloon columns for a Canyon Lake Animal Shelter Society fundraiser. The display ended up helping the shelter raise over \$20,000. The business has also donated balloon creations to help other charitable organizations like the Canyon Lake Area Chamber of Commerce during their casino night, Allen said.

The community has been just as vital to Balloon Man's charitable efforts. Last year, several Canyon Lake businesses stepped up to purchase a discounted balloon arch and set it up at a local school to honor bus drivers, Allen said. During the COVID-19 pandemic, local businesses sponsored balloon figures to give out to seniors in nursing homes.

"We love doing things like that," Allen said.



Balloon Man constructed a larger-than-life balloon wall honoring the Lone Star State accompanied by a realistic serpent for a company.

Courtesy of Balloon Man

Elevating the business

Sky is the limit for Balloon Man, which employs a small team of seven people with plans to add more. As for the new location that opened, it's the opportunity that Balloon Man has been waiting for to expand the business. The shop is equipped with a warehouse and showroom will help better serve customers and the community.

Allen, who just released a book called *The Big Book of Balloons: A Balloon's Life*, which features balloons through life events in chronological order, hopes to keep taking his business to the next level while staying true to Balloon Man's core values.

"I never want this to be an assembly line," Allen said. "I want to be able to create work for as many people that want to work and I want to create a team of people that just love each other."

To find out more about Balloon Man, view their extensive gallery, or commission your own balloon creation visit Balloon Man online.

June 22, 2023 | Updated June 25, 2023 8:18 p.m.

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Catherine Wilson has a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Maryland. She's spent the last year working as a reporter in New Braunfels, but is ready to return to her San Antonio childhood roots by joining the staff at MySA.com as a digital reporter.