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FIESTA ISLAND BALLOON LAUNCH SET FOR OCT. 17, EXPECTED TO REACH NEARLY 18 MILES ABOVE EARTH

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Source: SCOTT CAMERON / Wikimedia Commons

A weather balloon is set to lift off from Fiesta Island at noon Saturday, climbing roughly 18 miles above the Earth as part of HamTastic San Diego 2026, the annual gathering that draws amateur radio operators, families and curious onlookers to Mission Bay. The free event begins at sunrise on Oct. 17 and continues until organizers leave, with radio gear displays, satellite demonstrations, vintage equipment and a slate of presentations rounding out the day.

The gathering is hosted by the San Diego Repeater Association, a nonprofit open to licensed amateur radio operators known around the hobby as SANDRA, according to [the San Diego Union-Tribune](#). The club's own event site, [HamTastic San Diego](#), confirms there is

no admission fee and says the gathering is open to amateur radio operators, radio clubs, organizations, families and anyone curious about the hobby. Attendees are encouraged to bring a picnic and barbecue grills, and the day's first presentation is scheduled for 10 a.m.



What the Balloon Carries Skyward

The balloon itself weighs about 200 grams and carries a payload built around a reprogrammed radiosonde, an instrument originally used by the National Weather Service to collect atmospheric data, per the Union-Tribune's report. Its transmitter is set to broadcast the call sign K6GO, which hamtasticsd.com confirms is the identifier riding along on the flight. The Union-Tribune reports that K6GO is assigned to Gayle Olson of Poway.

According to the newspaper's report, the balloon is expected to reach a burst altitude of roughly 93,000 feet, nearly 18 miles up, after an ascent lasting about two hours. From there, the paper reports it is expected to come down roughly 30 miles southwest of the launch site, probably over the Pacific Ocean. None of those specific figures were independently verified beyond the newspaper's account.

Who's Behind the Controls

Accounts differ on exactly who will conduct Saturday's launch. The HamTastic event website lists Randy Standke, who uses the call sign KQ6RS, as the person launching the balloon at noon. The Union-Tribune's

report names both Standke, of Rancho Peñasquitos, and Gene Swiech, who uses the call sign WB9COY, as conducting the launch — the two accounts were not reconciled for this story. The newspaper also reports that Standke and Swiech mentor the Mt. Carmel High School Amateur Radio Club, which uses balloon launch demonstrations to teach students about amateur radio alongside science, technology, engineering and math.

According to [ARRL](#), Standke and Phil Karn have mentored members of that same club in designing and building a simple marine buoy transmitter.

Following the Flight From the Ground

Spectators who want to watch the balloon's climb without craning their necks skyward can track it in real time using SondeHub Amateur, the Union-Tribune reports. The tracking site, which [describes itself](#) as a display of telemetry from amateur radio high-altitude balloon launches, is expected to show the K6GO balloon appear on its map roughly 15 minutes before liftoff, according to the newspaper's report.

Beyond the balloon, the day is built around the broader culture of amateur radio. HamTastic's schedule includes ham radio club tents and information tables scattered around Fiesta Island, giving visitors a chance to talk shop with operators and see displays ranging from satellite demonstrations to vintage radio sets. For a community built on reaching distant signals, launching a transmitter 18 miles into the sky is less a stunt than a tradition.

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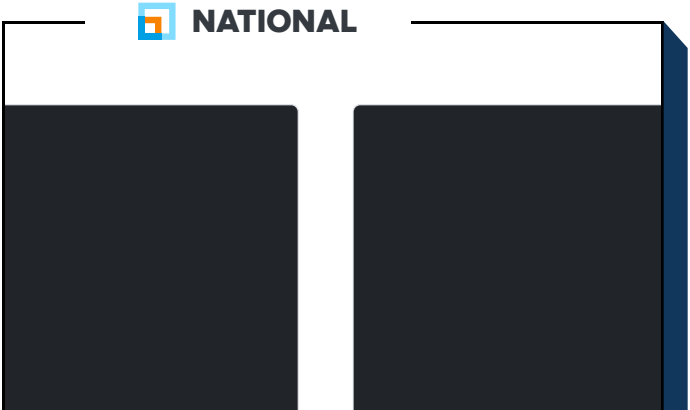
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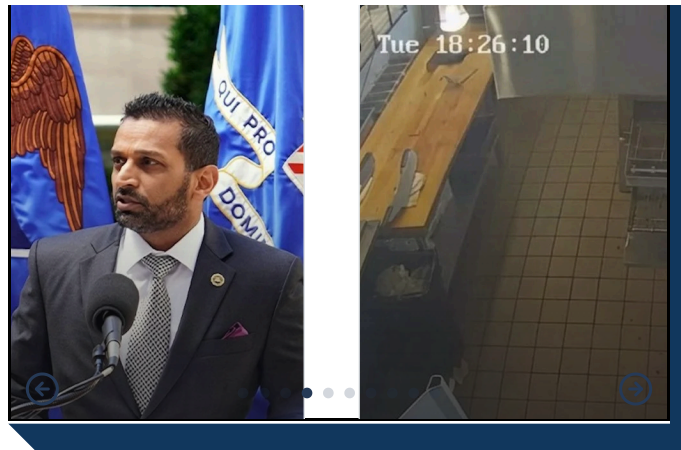
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