

We Took Jackson to the World.

When we made the decision to pursue hosting the Women's World Hot Air Balloon Championship, we knew it would be ambitious. What we didn't fully know—until we were in it—was just how much that effort would demand, and just how much it would give back.

This wasn't simply a bid. It was a test of whether a community like Jackson, Michigan could stand on a global stage and say, with credibility: *we are ready*.

And we did.

The process began long before any formal submission. It required taking a hard, honest look at what it takes to host a world championship. That meant evaluating everything—from flight conditions and tasking flexibility to landowner relationships, volunteer capacity, and infrastructure. Not in theory, but in practice. The advantage we had was simple: we weren't building something new. We were proving what already exists.

Jackson has quietly built one of the most consistent and respected ballooning events in the country. Through decades of the Hot Air Jubilee, we've developed the operational muscle, the community support, and the flying environment that elite competition demands. The question was whether we could translate that into a compelling case on an international stage.

So, we did the work.

We built a detailed proposal that outlined not just what we could do, but how we would do it—logistics, contingencies, competition structure, and community integration. We secured letters of support. We aligned partners. We told a unified story about what makes Jackson unique, and why it matters.

One of the most powerful tools in that effort was our bid video. It wasn't designed to impress—it was designed to demonstrate. To show, clearly and honestly, why flying here is exceptional. To capture the history of the Hot Air Jubilee and the credibility that comes with it. To make the case that Jackson isn't aspiring to host at a world-class level—it already does.

When we stepped into the international arena, we were prepared.

We refined our messaging, anticipated questions, and grounded every answer in experience. We understood that we weren't just presenting an event—we were representing a community, a history, and a standard that has been built over time.

And the response reflected that.

We heard, repeatedly, that our proposal was polished, professional, and compelling. That our video resonated. That Jackson stood out as a serious, capable host.

We did not ultimately secure the championship.

But reducing this experience to that outcome misses the point.

What we accomplished was larger than a single decision. We elevated Jackson onto a global platform. We showed that a mid-sized Michigan community can compete—credibly and confidently—at the highest levels of international sport. We validated the quality of what has been built here over decades.

And we learned.

We gained insight into how global events are evaluated, how destinations position themselves, and where the margins truly are. Those lessons don't disappear. They make us better, more prepared, more strategic, and more confident in what comes next.

Because there will be a next.

Jackson is not done pursuing opportunities that bring the world here. If anything, this experience sharpened that focus. It reinforced that we are not asking for a seat at the table—we have already earned one.

For our volunteers, our pilots, our sponsors, and our community, this moment belongs to you. The work you've put in over the years is what made this possible. It's what allowed us to stand in that room and represent Jackson with credibility and pride.

We went to the world stage. And we proved something important:

Jackson belongs there.

And now, more of the world knows it.