



THE ALBUQUERQUE TRIBUNE

WWW.ABQTRIB.COM

Artist designs balloon modeled after A-bomb

By Sue Vorenberg

SVORENBERG@ABQTRIB.COM/823-3678

If you see a nuclear weapon floating overhead in the Duke City this fall, no need to run for cover.

This hot-air balloon is modeled after Fat Man, one of two nuclear bombs designed at Los Alamos National Laboratory in the 1940s.

Months before it hits the skies in time for the 2006 Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, artist Chad Person's project is gathering static. One pilot

said he quit after getting pressure by his employers, who "didn't like the idea." Just this week, Person found another.

He's also looking for money to pay for the 105,000-cubic-foot gadget that calls to mind "The Gadget," code name for the first atomic bomb tested at White Sands.

"It's meant to be campy in a way," said Person, 27. "I like to splash in some humor. If you can't see humor in the world around you, we'd all go crazy."

Please see **A-BOMB/A3**

Tuesday, March 21, 2006

A-BOMB from A1

Not everyone sees humor in Fat Man, dropped on Nagasaki on Aug. 9, 1945, near the end of World War II. About 40,000 people were killed initially, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

"It's not something we should put in the closet or celebrate," Maria Santelli, co-coordinator of the Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, said of the New Mexico's connection to nuclear weapons. "It's something we should think of soberly and try to get rid of."

As long as the balloon doesn't glorify nuclear bombs, Santelli said it's a good idea.

"If it starts the conversation, that opens a door for us to face this in a sober and realistic way," Santelli said. "People should know what goes on here in New Mexico and that production still goes on here in nuclear weapons."

Person's goal is to highlight two dissimilar but important aspects of New Mexico history: nuclear weapons and hot-air ballooning.

"It's sort of like a dirty secret," Person said of the state's relationship with the deadly weapons. "We don't embrace it."

Person has been working on the balloon since December. He has finished designing it and has a company lined up to build it. The hurdle is finding enough money to build it in time for this year's balloon fiesta, which runs from Oct. 6 to 15.

He has about \$8,000 toward the cost of the \$50,000 project. His Web site, at www.buildthebomb.com, asks for \$10 donations from the public.

If he doesn't get enough to finish the project, he would donate the money to arts education, Person said.

"This is the biggest undertaking that I've ever done in terms of an art piece," said Person, who works as a commercial artist by day. He has a master's degree in fine arts from the University of New Mexico. Houston Hawkins, a senior

fellow at Los Alamos, says celebrating the state's nuclear history with a Fat Man balloon is a great idea. He has seen the design on Person's Web site.

"It's a very, very clever design that captures a lot of the aspects of New Mexico," said Hawkins, who has worked at the lab since 1988. "I think a lot of people from Los Alamos would come down and see it."

Hawkins' 86-year-old father was in the Navy during World War II and was stationed on a minesweeper off the coast of Japan when Nagasaki and Hiroshima were bombed.

His father was set to sweep the beaches of Japan before a U.S. invasion, but casualties on those missions were expected to be high. The bombings forced Japan to surrender, and his father didn't have to sweep the beach, Hawkins said.

"It's part of our history," Hawkins said. "Making people aware of it — whatever your current persuasion — is probably a good thing."

Hawkins said that thousands of years ago, American Indians drew petroglyphs of the sun in the caves above what is now the lab. In a way, that artwork foretold what the lab did.

"At Los Alamos, we created a sun," he said. "There are a lot of tie-ins that need to be recognized. This would help do that."

Person says nuclear weapons scare him. The objective isn't to glorify them but to bring the subject up for discussion in an artistic way, he said.

"I'll never understand what it's like to live in a world where there isn't such a thing as nuclear weapons," Person said. "I remember learning about them in school, and I was terrified."

Part of his motivation to build the balloon came after a visit to Trinity Site in White Sands, where the first atomic bomb was tested.

Person said he was surprised by "the sense of power and mystique on a site that's essentially nothing."

"It's the one thing in the last 60 years that's really changed everyone's lives," he said.