

MIT Space Balloon Team

Global Space Balloon Challenge 2015
Submission for “Most Charitable Team”

Report Overview

This report summarizes the MIT Space Balloon Team’s charitable efforts towards Shriners Hospitals for Children. First, the launch itself is reviewed, and a few results are shown. Next, the target charity, Shriners Hospitals for Children, is described and the effects on the local and global community are assessed. Finally, the total donations are tallied and presented. The appendix includes a list of team members and links to press articles and videos.

Launch Summary

Launch occurred on April 12, 2015 at Gulf Farms in Cheshire, MA USA. The balloon at liftoff is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: MIT Space Balloons & Team at Liftoff

A 1200g balloon was used and filled with about 200 cubic inches of helium. In the end, the balloon traveled over 100 miles down range and reached an estimated 90,000-100,000 feet in altitude.

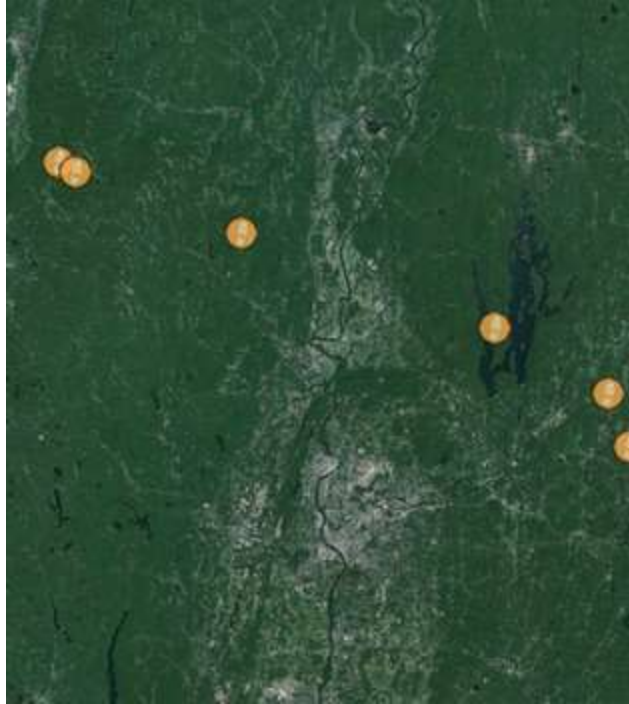


Figure 2: Ground Track of the MIT Space Balloon Across Central Massachusetts, USA

Many amazing views were captured. Here is one of our favorites right before burst altitude. TIM The Beaver, the mascot of MIT and engineer of the animal world, was strapped to the front seat of the balloon and carried a Shriners banner all the way to the edge of space and back (Figure 3).



Figure 3: TIM The Beaver Overlooking the Curvature of the Earth

Charitable Contributions

Our team dedicated our 2015 space balloon to one of the most charitable causes we could think of: Shriners Hospital for Children. We aimed to raise awareness and support for this life-saving cause through a combination of fundraising, personal letters and local press. The Global Space Balloon Challenge has provided a one-of-a-kind platform for inspiring aid and support for the brave children and their caretakers.

Shriners Hospitals for Children provides highly specialized pediatric surgical care for children with severe burn injuries, complex skin conditions, and cleft lip/palate. Even more incredibly, all care and services are provided regardless of the patients' ability to pay. Personally, members of our team met members of the staff and were able to witness firsthand incredible bravery, strength, resilience, and love throughout this organization. Shriners Hospital provides an environment which gives hope for the children to conquer their injuries and regain strength and function for life.

In addition to the TIM The Beaver token, MIT's space balloon carried mission patches and personal letters for the Shriners patients, and also performed a novel sound experiment using a calibrated microphone and speakers. Upon the balloon's recovery, the MIT team delivered the cargo and donations to the hospital in an event attended by patients and their families. "After we showed them the video of their banner overlooking the curvature of the Earth, all of the kids declared that they wanted to be astronauts or engineers," said Duncan Miller, an MIT Space Balloon member.



Figure 4: A Contingent of the MIT Space Balloon Team Delivered Gifts to Shriners Hospital Post-Launch

Contributions to the Local Community

The MIT Space Balloon launch was a high profile event in metro-Boston that helped raise awareness for the Shriners cause. The Appendix includes a listing of many of the press articles surrounding the launch. A local radio station piece was also released. Thomas D'Esmond, Boston Shriners Hospital administrator, said, "We are so proud of the team and their commitment to ... raising funds and increasing awareness of Shriners Hospital for Children in Boston."

Most importantly, the balloon payload included personal letters, mission patches, and party balloons as gifts to the pediatric patients at Shriners. Figure 5 shows one of these cards. After recovery, the gifts were able to be delivered to Shriners at an incredibly inspiring event that hosted over a dozen patients and their families. We were able to show a highlight video and distribute pictures of the launch and in-flight views. Everyone seemed to leave inspired, elated, and in great spirits. This was exactly the positive and uplifting experience we hoped to bring to their lives at Shriners Hospital.



Figure 5: One of Many Personal Letters to the Shriners Patients

Contributions to the Global Community

Shriners Hospitals for Children is a global network of 22 hospitals across North America. However, Shriners is recognized as the best burn treatment facility for children **in the entire world**. Indeed, over 10% of all burn publications published last year came out of Shriners. In fact, during our tour of the hospital, they had just flown in a Ukrainian national hero with the Ukrainian First Lady, as the little girl had apparently dived into a burning building to save others. Another example of Shriners' global reach was evident during our gift delivery ceremony – about a third of the patients and their families were Hispanic and thus a translator was needed to translate our story for them.

Our efforts were broadcast to the Shriners community on social media and through various press releases (Figure 6). We expect that the footage from the balloon flight will be used in future Shriners media to help rally support for their cause.



Figure 6: The International Shriners Facebook Post Alone Reached 1749 views and 177 Shares Among the Global Community

Overview of Donations

In total, the MIT Space Balloon Team raised \$5,250 for Shriners Hospitals for Children. Here is a link to our fundraising page:

<https://www.crowdrise.com/ShrinersHospitalBoston/fundraiser/duncanmiller>

Appendix

Team Members:

- Duncan Miller (Co-Lead)
- Eddie Obropta (Co-Lead)
- Devon Jedamski
- Zahra Khan
- Anton Aboukhalil
- Aaron Ashely
- Connor Cullinane
- Janelle Wellson
- Forrest Meyen
- Joeseph Figura
- Sherrie Hall

Press Releases:

- http://www.berkshireagle.com/local/ci_27899608/mit-global-space-balloon-team-raises-awareness-shriners
- <http://www.bostonmagazine.com/news/blog/2015/04/10/mit-global-space-balloon-challenge/>
- <https://www.shrinershospitalsforchildren.org/news/MIT%20global%20space%20balloon%20challenge>
- <https://newsoffice.mit.edu/2015/tim-beaver-travels-edge-space-charity-0511>

Highlight Video:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRHSIY7rLlw>