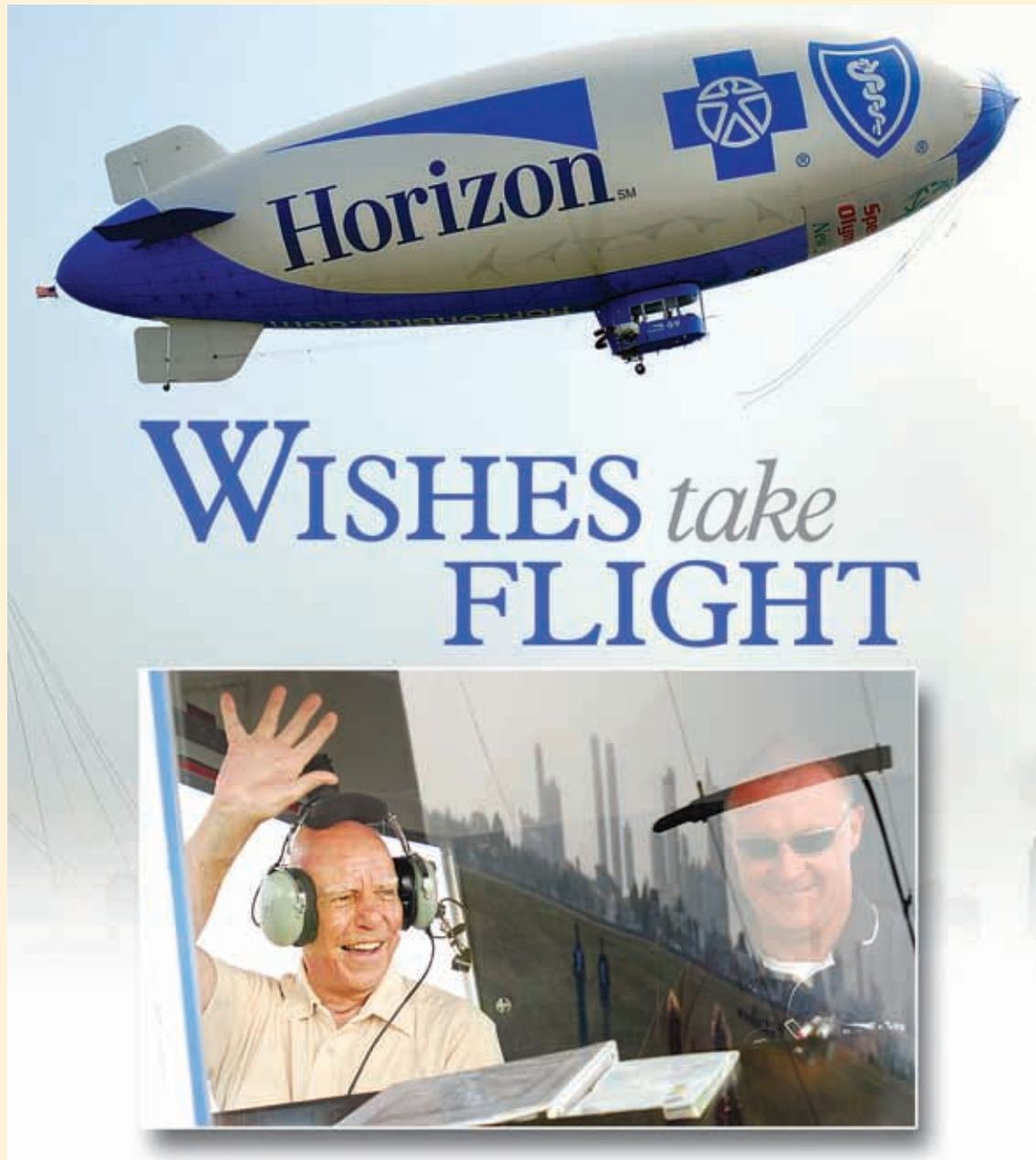


# The Intelligencer

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Serving communities in Bucks and Montgomery counties

Doylestown, Pa.



Gian Luiso/The Intelligencer

**Valentine Seidle of Doylestown** waves as pilot Steve Tomlin prepares for takeoff. This was fulfillment of a lifelong dream for 87-year-old Seidle.

*A group of senior citizens from Doylestown and the region got to check out the Atlantic City skyline from a blimp.*

BY MARION CALLAHAN  
THE INTELLIGENCER

It was 1927. Valentine Seidle was in second grade. He recalls the teacher, "the stern Mrs. Baxter stopping her lecture in mid-sentence as the class rushed to the window."

All eyes were fixed on a silver airship hovering above the school. "It looked like a silver cigar; it was the most beautiful thing I ever saw," said Seidle, now 87. "Since that day, I've dreamed of riding in one."

Years later, Seidle's father took him to the Lakehurst, N.J., location of the Hindenburg disaster, where the German airship burst into flames in 1937, killing dozens of people. "After we saw the charred wreckage, my father asked if I still wanted to fly in one; I said 'yes.'"

"Now, here I go," Seidle said Tuesday morning, minutes before fulfilling his decades-old dream. In the blimp's cockpit, fit for four, he floated 1,000 feet above the shore's Bader airfield, marveling at the view of the Atlantic City shoreline.

"It's hard to put into words; it was so quiet compared to the plane I flew in World War II. It was just wonderful." Seidle was among a group of senior citizens from Doylestown and the region to board the Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield New Jersey Blimp,

one of only 20 blimps in operation in the world. The 30-minute aerial tour was made possible by Twilight Wish Foundation, a group that grants wishes to seniors. Tuesday's passengers, from Heritage Towers in Doylestown and Philadelphia, were selected based on an essay contest.

Betty Frey, 84, wrote of her memories as a teenager, witnessing the aftermath of the Hindenburg crash. She remembers clutching her father's hand after seeing the smoldering remains.

"My father stood with four little kids, holding hands, and we prayed for those who died in the crash; I'll never forget that," she said.

Seventy years later, clutching a disposable camera her grandchildren gave her, she said, "I wasn't afraid. My father would be proud. I did something I never thought I'd do."

She snapped 19 photos from the air, she said. "What a thrill."

From the airfield, Ruth Berreth, 85, waited her turn, embracing her friends as they returned from their trip. Berreth said she had always been fascinated by air travel and dreamed of adventures in the sky. In the 1940s, she wanted to become a flight attendant, but chose "a career in marriage instead." A few years ago, she stepped into the basket of a hot air balloon

"But it just couldn't get off the ground; they couldn't get it inflated."

## Blimp facts

**Length:** 128 feet  
**Height:** 44 feet  
**Width:** 36 feet  
**Passengers:** 3, plus pilot  
**Volume:** 68,000 cubic feet of helium  
**Range:** 425 miles  
**Speed:** 32 mph cruising; 55 mph maximum



### Did you know?

- Only 20 blimps are in operation around the world.
- Illuminated blimps are often mistaken for UFOs.
- There are no brakes on the airship.
- The airship is never left alone; a crew member must check the vessel every hour to be sure there are no leaks.

On Tuesday, she reached the steps of yet another aircraft. But the blimp's crew grounded the flight, after dark clouds and strong winds moved in.

Berreth's wish, the crew promised, would come true another day.

She was disappointed, but not defeated. Just minutes earlier, as she watched her friends soar above the city, she said the day was about "the

excitement," not the flight.

"Days like this make us want to get up and go, instead of sitting; we're not that old. We haven't forgotten all the wonderful things there are left to do. We still have plenty of time to enjoy life."

Marion Callahan can be reached at (215) 345-3166 or mcallahan@phillyburbs.com.