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Jane Holeman, who retired last year. “I love seeing the look on people’s faces when they first see the fantastic array of kites,” Darland said.

She marvels at the skill of the flyers, adding that the art of keeping a kite airborne is a mix of science, math, music, aerodynamics, dexterity and luck. She also recalls her own kite experiences growing up.

“I had an iconic Joel Scholz parrot kite as a kid and I was so excited to actually meet him,” she said, looking forward to festival attendees’ chance to meet kite flying legends. “I can’t wait for others to experience all that our event has to offer, including a music festival.”

This beach extravaganza is sure to have something for everyone. Each of the event’s seven days will be filled with activities, including workshops, competitions and concerts.

**Attendees at a previous Washington State International Kite Festival enjoy the breeze.**

The beach will be divided into fields, where different events will take place. The festival’s main events and competitions will be held in front of the Long Beach

Boardwalk, a convenient spot for spectator viewing.

The family-friendly kids’ day is fun for all ages, with games, contests and kite makers giving away small kites to children. Senior volunteers known as “foster grandparents” are then available to pair with the children to help them learn to fly their new kites.

The teddy bear drop is another anticipated returning kids’ event, where beachgoers will scramble to pick up teddy bears that fall from the sky.

Competitions for grown-up kite flyers include individual and team “battles,” featuring fighter kites and traditional Japanese warrior kites, as well as the “senior ballet” for those over 50. The latter will be judged on

music selection, ease of control, grace and innovation.

Other events include a “mass ascension” for junior flyers and the “stacks” competition, which requires a series of three or more maneuverable sport kites tethered together in sequence. This allows for a single flyer to control all of the kites at one time for a couple of minutes. The world record for such a maneuver was set at Long Beach in 2019 with an impressive 20 pilots, keeping 117 kites aloft and choreographed for seven minutes.

Many experienced flyers create their own handmade kites. Divisions for these unique aircraft include traditional, stunt, centipedes and trains, innovative design and concepts, novelty, artistry, line accessories and the tiniest kite.

The festival began in 1981 as a collaboration between local kite enthusiasts and the Long Beach Merchants Association. By 1989, thanks to local kite store owners Kay and Jim Buesing, along with a core of kite devotees, the nonprofit World Kite Museum was born, a natural venue to oversee the festival.

“Kay was not just a person who owned a kite store,” Jim Mockford, a longtime friend and fellow kite aficionado, said. “She took a leading role in the museum, organizing and promoting the festivals. She was doing remarkable things, working a kind of world-wide kite diplomacy.”

Kay, who died in 2021 at age 86, put Long Beach front and center in the international kite community.

“The breadth and variety of the festival is astounding,” Darland said. Taking over from Holeman is an awesome responsibility, she adds, noting that her predecessor was part of the original group of festival developers in the 1980s.

“I intend to carry on that tradition and keep adding to the experiences of the museum and what has become the largest kite festival in the country,” she said.

“I love how much fun people have,” she added. “My face, like theirs, is always lit up with amazement.”

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