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The Wizard of Oz, portrayed by Richard Rutter, climbed into a hot-air balloon on the Indiana University campus during the first day of festivities Thursday.

## Yellow-brick road of Oz leads devoted fans to Bloomington

### Indiana gathering marks centennial of writer's work

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BLOOMINGTON, Ind. — This weekend you can while away the hours, conferrin' with the flowers, or consultin' with an expert on the impact "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" has had on Russia.

Sound like a bunch of hot air? Not to the devoted fans who will travel to Indiana University for this weekend's International Wizard of Oz Club Centennial Convention.

Yes, it's now been 100 years since Frank L. Baum published the classic flight of fancy that brought us Dorothy, the wicked witch and a phalanx of Munchkins that nowadays would likely be considered politically incorrect.

For days, Oz fans have been driving, flying and caravaning in large trucks to bring memorabilia to Bloomington in celebration of the 100th anniversary. With each arrival,

empty display cases and blank walls in IU's Memorial Union become exhibits that showcase pieces of the world's Oz obsession — memoirs, collectibles, posters, books, games, dolls, you name it.

Jane Albright has been planning the event from her home in Topeka, Kan., for five years. More than 70 IU and Bloomington events are planned to unfold over the three-day event, which started Thursday. The events include a number of speakers on topics ranging from the Russian translation of the novel to how the places where Baum lived inspired certain aspects of Oz.

About 370 people have registered for the convention.

"So far it seems to all be coming together," Albright said. "Even though we are here now there is still much to be done before things start rolling."

Gili Bar-Hillel, who traveled more than 17 hours to Bloomington from Tel Aviv, Israel, said it has been great to finally meet those who she has only communicated with in writing.

"Having a fascination with Oz isn't popular in Israel, but my collection grows through correspondence with

pen pals and an Internet connection. I am always trading things with people through the mail" Bar-Hillel said.

She now works translating Harry Potter and other children's books in Israel.

Ten-year-old Jamie Teller, who came to the convention with his parents, from Pittsburgh, Kan., said his favorite part of attending the conferences is traveling and exploring the places where they're conducted.

Ryan Bunch, a master's student from the University of Maryland, is an emerging puppeteer who adapted a story line from an Oz book. He has been attending Oz conferences since the age of 11, and said he created 12 puppets featured in the shows he'll be putting on.

"It is a subculture," Bunch said of the gathering. "But really, for a lot of us, it is like a big surrogate family of people interested in fantasy and fiction."

Bar-Hillel agreed.

"It's more than just a hobby, it's more than just collecting," she said. "People really get into the plot and the literature, and not the glitz and glamour of the movie."