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## **Inaugural Ballooniversity® “On the Road” Draws New Customers to Summer Markets**

*Bogart, GA (August 6, 2008)*

For over twenty years, florists, balloon retailers, and members of the gift industry have flocked to Bogart, GA each summer for an intensive 4-day training session. This year, burton + BURTON™ decided to make the award winning training available to more people by taking the event “On the Road.”

Condensed, one-day training events were held recently during the Summer Gift Markets at AmericasMart in Atlanta and the Chicago Merchandise Mart. Attendees participated in classes that included Basic Floral Design, Merchandising Trends and Strategies, Balloon Basics, and Gift Basket Design. Classes were taught by notable industry names including Talmage McLaurin, Publisher of *Florists’ Review* magazine, and Bill J. Harper, one of the floral industry’s leading designers and instructors.

Over 400 people attended the events. **Steve Casso, General Manager for burton + BURTON** said, “The traditional Ballooniversity format needed to be restructured to accommodate more people. By partnering with two of the largest gift markets in the country, we were able to bring our Brand to people who had never heard of Ballooniversity. In some cases, we drew in people who had never even been to the Chicago or Atlanta Gift Markets.”

**Albert Maslia, Managing Director of Retail Services** for AmericasMart in Atlanta said, “AmericasMart is committed to furthering retailer education and understands the importance of exhibitors helping strengthen the Market experience for buyers. burton + BURTON took the initiative to establish Ballooniversity On the Road, and it was a success for everyone involved. Our partnership with this program enabled us to continue building relationships with customers and to provide a unique educational opportunity. By creating events like Ballooniversity, burton + BURTON continues to be on the forefront of innovation and retailer education—a true leader in the industry.”

**Craig Dooley, VP of Marketing** for the Chicago Market, echoed similar thoughts. “The Chicago Market’s partnership with burton + BURTON to produce its Ballooniversity event was a tremendous success all around, providing invaluable education and opportunities for retailers to differentiate and build their businesses. Our loyal retail buyers enjoyed yet another valuable reason to shop Chicago, and this inspiring programming enticed new buyers to experience all that The Merchandise Mart offers.”

After a day of learning and fun, a reception was held in the burton + BURTON showrooms to honor the recent Ballooniversity “graduates.” Sales representatives were on hand to demonstrate products to retail buyers, with many placing orders for the products they had used in classes earlier in the day.

“Based on what we’ve seen, there is indeed a demand for applicable training that comes to the customer rather than asking them to travel to us. I would imagine that in the future this format will grow to include more markets, more classes, and more people,” says burton + BURTON’s Steve Casso.

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