

## Filipino wins Macy's balloon contest

Written by Administrator  
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**New York Fil-Am artist Keith Lapinig with the elf he designed.**

A New York Fil-Am artist bested 1,000 other contestants from as far as Alaska and Florida when he was picked to design a giant elf balloon for the 85th Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in November.

Keith Lapinig, a 25-year-old Web graphic artist for Sleepy's mattress company, won the chance to create his vision for this year's Macy's star giant balloon when an elf he designed topped

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online votes on Facebook.

"I'm still shaking," Lapinig of Holliswood, Queens, told the *Daily News*.

"I've never won something of this magnitude before."

Macy's officials surprised Lapinig Tuesday after coaxing him to their midtown offices on the guise he was among 85 contest finalists.

"I felt comfortable getting into 85th place, but as far as getting the most votes, I had no idea," said the Queens-born artist, whose family comes from Cebu.

The popular retail giant launched the first ever "Macy's Great American Elf Adventure" on Aug. 19 with a scavenger hunt for 10,000 elf models hidden in its 699 stores in 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and Guam.

Lapinig said he found one of the colorless gnomes in a Long Island Macy's and transformed it into a multicolor creation.

He named his elf Gazer.

Photos of his design were posted online with thousands of other entries for Macy's customers to vote on.

The top 85 best entries were selected by a team of Macy's parade officials, and Macy's Facebook fans selected the winner.

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To see the winning design, as well as the top 85 entries log on to [Facebook.com/Macys](https://www.facebook.com/Macys) and "like" the Elf Adventure application.

"This really was America's choice," Amy Kule, executive producer of the annual Macy's grand parade told the *Daily News*.

Lapinig said he sought celestial inspiration for his winning entry.

"I saw it had a round body and a round face...so I thought of the moon," Lapinig said.

"I had the New York skyline at the bottom and I love doing clouds as well. I wanted to incorporate the Macy's logo, so I kept that as well."

His selection marks just the third time in the nearly 85-year history of the parade that Macy's has let someone other than its own designers create a balloon.

"I am flabbergasted at winning this contest," he said.

"It's my dream...I can honestly say that now I feel accomplished as an artist."

Since 1947, the iconic Macy's elf balloons have been fan favorites and for generations have served as an emblem of the Macy's parade.

Recreated in 2000, the elf has grown into a family consisting of C.J., Charlie and Kit which each year guide Santa Claus down the parade route.

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Lapinig's Gazer is described by the artist as having an important role to play in the holiday season.

When not flying down the streets of Manhattan, Gazer helps fulfill the wishes of thousands of children that visit Santa Claus at Macy's Herald Square each year.

Once a wish is whispered to Santa Claus, it becomes a star which Gazer then guides safely to the North Pole, so that each wish becomes a reality.

Gazer's design was inspired by the story of R.H. Macy who chose Macy's famed star emblem after a fateful fishing trip that found him lost at sea.

Mr. Macy credited the North Star with guiding him safely back to shore and so he made it the trademark of his New York City store.

Aside from the prominent star on his hat, other elements of the design include the shape of the moon on Gazer's face, the New York City skyline on his feet, and the wishing star trail that wraps around his body.

From here, the unique design will be transformed into a flying wonder by the artists at Macy's Parade Studio who will replicate the vision onto a 34 foot-tall balloon that will join the 85th parade line-up.

Lapinig has won a VIP seating and accommodations for himself and three guests to enjoy his elf's maiden flight in front of more than 3.5 million spectators and more than 50 million television viewers.