

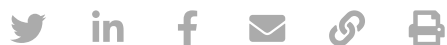


COMMENTARY

Knoxville is the new skydiving capital of Iowa

ROBERT LEONARD

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📷 Members of the Des Moines Skydivers soar over Knoxville, Iowa, Oct. 1, 2022. (Photo courtesy of Randy Roth)

The [Des Moines Skydivers](#), currently jumping out of the Winterset airport, will build a new home in Knoxville. On Oct. 1, members of the group checked out what jumping out above Knoxville would be like. Their move to town will be official on April 1, 2023.

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I interviewed Randy Roth, spokesperson for the group, in a program that aired on Sept. 30 on [KNIA/KRLS](#). I was excited to announce to the community that the group was coming. I was tipped off that the event was happening by my friend Steve Mitchell, who is on the airport board. Steve is the former superintendent of Melcher-Dallas

Public Schools and is now on the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners.

Randy told me that Knoxville was the perfect fit for the new home for the Des Moines Skydivers. He said Airport Manager Dan Van Donselaar, the airport board, the city manager, the mayor, and the city council were all enthusiastic about the move.

Who wouldn't be? Look at the fun this young woman is having while tandem jumping!



📷 (Photo courtesy of Randy Roth)

Randy tells me that with the club being housed in the community, there will likely be an economic impact of \$250,000 to \$300,000 per year.

But enough of me rambling! Here is the video Randy shot with his GoPro of one of his flights on Saturday:

Knoxville Inaugural Jump 2 10/1/22



Here was my view from the ground.

October 1, 2022



Fantastic!

But where does skydiving come from? Here is one answer, according to [Skydiving Melbourne](#):

“The concept of falling from the sky dates as far back as the 1100s in China when the Chinese would do what today we call ‘base jumping’; jumping from cliffs or outcroppings floating to the ground in makeshift parachutes.

“Later in 1485, the renowned Leonardo DaVinci sketched the blueprints for the first parachute. ... The actual history of skydiving starts with Frenchman Andre-Jacques Garnerin, who made successful parachute descents in 1797 using a canvas canopy and a small basket tied beneath a hot air balloon. The first recorded free fall jump is credited to Leslie Irvin in 1919, and the earliest competitive dives date back to the 1930s. ... Skydiving became much more mainstream once the military began developing parachute technology and used the act of skydiving as a tactical move during World War II. After the war, skydiving became much more popular as many returning soldiers took it up and had regular competitions, which led to it becoming a national sport in 1952.”

Steven Wade, in his 2011 [thesis](#) at Western Kentucky University, says skydiving culture places a high value on individual achievement, self-reliance, and adherence to routine, and it promotes a strong sense of community among its members in his consideration of Skydive Kentucky in Elizabethtown.

James Hardie-Bick and Penny Bonner compare skydiving and climbing in an [examination](#) that explores “the motivations, behaviors, and experiences of those who engage in high-risk activities.”

They say it’s all about experiencing “flow” and joy as part of the risk. They cite the [work](#) of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, one of the first scholars to research flow. Flow is a “concept describing those moments when you’re completely absorbed in a challenging but doable task.”

Csikszentmihalyi says:

“The best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times . . . The best moments usually occur if a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.”

Like skydiving.

Randy tells me they have leased land adjacent to the airport and plan to build a clubhouse. They will also build a private camping site for visiting skydivers and members that won’t be open to the public.

I can imagine after a long day of jumping; it would be fun to sit around a campfire with friends and have a cookout and a few beers.

Randy also tells me that the plane flew 15 “loads” on Saturday. I presume that means loads of people or 15 flights. And 26 people made skydives for a total of 59 jumps! How cool is that?

The world needs risk-takers. To take us to the edge of the human experience. To lead us there, examine the boundaries, and report to the rest of us what they have experienced. And how they have grown, so we might too.



📷 (Photo by Robert Leonard)

I felt like a kid again, wandering around with my friend Steve, checking out the airport while the skydivers were getting ready. I can't help sharing this photo of Steve, laying down on the grass, trying to spot the skydivers as they fell to earth.

No matter how old we are, there's a little boy or girl in all of us, and here you can see the little boy in Steve.

I'm proud to call him friend. Randy, too. And I look forward to meeting more new friends as the Des Moines Skydivers learn to call Knoxville home. Let me say it first – Knoxville is the new “Skydiving Capital of Iowa!”

Steve and Randy also suggest “Knoxville: The Daredevil’s Destination” or Knoxville: “The Adrenaline Capital of Iowa.” Both would be fun.

I'll probably never jump. But I think Steve will. Randy just has to ask him if he wants to.

Robert Leonard's column appeared originally at “[Deep Midwest: Politics and Culture](#).” It is republished here through the [Iowa Writers' Collaborative](#).

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