

Man skydives to celebrate 95th birthday



GALLERIES

Skydiver

By **Randi Shaffer**, *The Morning Sun*

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Instead of celebrating his 95th birthday with some cake and close friends, Earl Gates decided to take a jump from a plane two miles above ground.



The Mt. Pleasant resident, who turned 95 on May 11, said he was not nervous at all for the jump, and skydiving was something he had wanted to do all his life.

The experience itself, Gates said, was “just something enjoyable.”

“Just like on the fairground, those rides you take,” he said. “It’s the same thing. I just wanted to be sure I do everything right, that was all.”

More than 40 friends and family members, including children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, stood at the end of the Mt. Pleasant Municipal Airport tarmac for the approximately 17-minute flight time, waiting to see Gates’s parachute appear in the clear blue sky. Gates broke Central Michigan Skydiving’s previous record for oldest skydiver, which was 87.

For the jump, Gates rode tandem with Central Michigan Skydiving co-owner Scott Schlosser.

Because Gates wears hearing aids, some family members expressed concerns that Gates might not have heard the instructions that Schlosser gave.

Schlosser said Gates did great and everything went smoothly.

“He seemed very excited, not nervous at all,” he said. “It was great to meet him.”

Central Michigan Skydiving co-owner Lisa Schlosser said the tandem dive was the typical way anyone starts skydiving.

“They’ll go two miles high, they’ll free-fall the first mile at a speed of 120 miles per hour,” she said. “At about 6,000 feet, the instructor will pull the parachute and they’ll parachute the second mile.”

Lisa Schlosser said free-falling usually takes about 40 seconds, and parachuting the second mile takes between four and six minutes.

Gates started his adventure by filling out routine paperwork, answering questions about his height, weight and general health.

“There’s not a medication I take, not one,” he said.

Mt. Pleasant resident Leona Moreno said aside from using hearing aids and having glaucoma, her father was in peak physical shape.

“He called ... and he said, ‘you know what I’m going to do for my 95th birthday? I’m going to skydive,’” Moreno said. “I said, ‘Really?’ I was excited so I called the family. Some people said it’s amazing, but many people say he’s crazy.”

Ohio resident Carol Tettaton said though she was feeling a little apprehensive about watching her father skydive, she came to watch regardless.

She described Gates as a reckless and determined adventure seeker with a tender side and a strong love for his family.

One of Gates’ great-grandsons, Bedford resident Jon Moreno, 15, said he had told all of his friends about the amazing feat.

“I’m probably more nervous than he is, because he’s pretty brave,” he said.

Gates and Scott Schlosser landed the parachute to cheering and waving from all who arrived.

“Well hi everybody,” Gates shouted, waving. “We made it!”

Gates said though the experience was enjoyable, he probably would not try it again.

“We’ll wait until I’m 96 or 98 and we’ll try again, maybe,” he said.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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