

Former Waterloo resident celebrates 89th birthday with first tandem jump

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MARSHALL — A small crowd of people shielded their eyes as they looked at the mostly clear sky the morning of Aug. 7. They were searching for a small plane circling above.

“It’s over there, by those clouds,” one attendee said as everyone adjusted themselves to get a better look.

As significant as looking for the location of the plane was, it was a multi-colored parachute’s position that was more important to the viewers as Hazel Estervig, formerly of Waterloo, was participating in her first tandem skydiving experience as a way to belatedly celebrate her 89th birthday.

Prior to boarding the plane, Estervig explained how she ended up at Seven Hills Skydiving Club six miles outside of Marshall.

It all began during a cruise with family members and bungee jumping. Estervig’s grandson, John, graduated from high school in 2010 and as a present, she took him to Greece and Italy. While cruising on the Mediterranean Sea, she and her family were talking about extreme sports.

“I said, ‘who’d ever want to bungee jump? That’s just, I can’t imagine anyone wanting to do that,’” Estervig said. “Then John says ‘how about skydiving?’ He said ‘if I do it will you?’ So he challenged me and I said ‘OK, we’ll do it.’”

She said she was not the least bit nervous about skydiving and told her family “if something happens, I’ve had a good life. I think it’s a wonderful way to celebrate my birthday.”

Estervig said she was taking part of her family with her on the jump, pointing out her earrings had been a birthday gift from her children and the diamond on her necklace was from her first engagement ring.

Prior to the plane taking off, Estervig’s children playfully teased her by saying things along the lines of “if you don’t make it ...” though one of her children said there was no way Estervig was going to die before her first great-grandchild was born in January of 2012.

As the plane carrying Estervig, the instructor, cameraman and pilot prepared to take-off, the attendees enthusiastically waved. It would be another 30 or so minutes before they would see her again.

When her family and friends saw the multi-colored parachute descend, they watched as it gracefully floated down to the ground near the landing area. Upon landing, there was applause and shouts of congratulations to the 89-year-old.



“It was awesome,” Estervig said. “I watched the ground as we were going up, I love flying anyway, and especially in the little plane ... and then when they opened that side door, that was a little scary though. The wind rushed in and [the videographer] jumped out. He said ‘all you have to do is keep smiling’ and I said well, I guess that isn’t too hard to do.”

Estervig lauded the staff at 7 Hills, saying they were wonderful to work with and gracious.

“I didn’t even have to scream,” she said. “Then I could look at everything as I was coming down ... it was just a gentle ride down.”

While getting an orientation from the Seven Hills staff, Estervig had one concern – being on her knees before leaving the plane. After landing, she said that was the most difficult and scariest part of the jump.

While this was her first skydiving experience, it was not the first time she attempted the extreme sport. A couple weeks earlier, she and an entourage of 44 well-wishers gathered at Seven Hills only to have the jump cancelled due to weather. This time, while there was some rain in the morning, conditions were favorable.

Estervig lived in Waterloo from 1960-1983 where she and her husband started Rayjoe, currently known as Sussek Machining. All five of her children graduated from Waterloo High School and her daughter, Elaine, and her husband currently live in Waterloo. Estervig resides in Madison. Her husband, Ray, served on Waterloo’s first council after becoming a city and later was mayor.

“We were active in a lot of things in Waterloo,” she said. “I loved being on the library board and the library so that was special to me.”

Though Estervig has not lived in the community for nearly three decades, she still has friends in the city.

Estervig was not alone on her venture as her daughter, Barb, and grandson, John, also took in their inaugural tandem skydives.

After the dive, Estervig was asked if she changed her mind about bungee jumping. Would she consider that as her next challenge?

Her answer regarding that extreme sport remains the same. Asked if she would skydive again, Estervig told her family and friends “sure” though she mentioned she has now “been there, done that.”