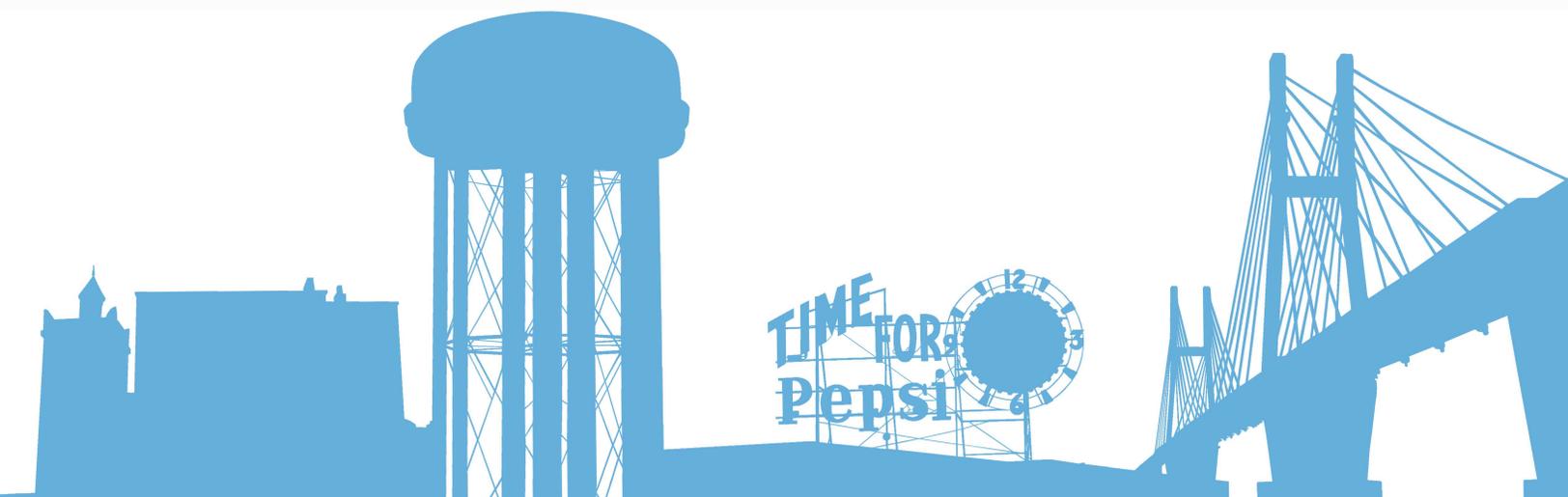


Wild
QUINCY

WildQuincy.com



1. Overview

- a. When you hear the word “boogie” what do you think?
 - i. a boogie is a term for a large skydiving event, where a skydiving center comes alive with the gathering of unique airplanes, world-class skydivers, and fun nightly activities where most, have life-changing experiences and fall in love with skydiving even more.
- b. The Dive
 - i. According to a 1990 article in the QHW, Skydivers leave the plane between 8,000 and 17,000 feet, free fall for 1,500 to 2,500 feet (approx. 69 seconds of falling at speeds roughly 180 mph) and then open their chutes (slowing down to 120 mph).
 - ii. Tandem diving is where two people jump together.
 1. The one person could be inexperienced in jumping and could go along for the ride
 - iii. In a 1993 article it states that divers with less than 60 jumps are not allowed to participate at the convention. In 1994 Skydive University came to the event which allowed sky divers of all levels to attend.
 1. Skydive U allowed skydivers with more than 25 jumps to increase their skill level.
 2. If they had less than 25 jumps they would jump with a Skydive U instructor.

2. The Beginning

- a. The Founders
 - i. The World Free Fall Convention was developed and is organized by Don Kirlin. Don has been an aviation enthusiast since the age of five, when he flew on his father's lap at the controls of their 1946 Ercoupe. His goal was to have the most exhilarating skydive boogie in the world brought to his community, Quincy, IL, and to use this event to educate and encourage other enthusiasts.

It was apparent from the beginning that a large number of people shared his passion for skydiving, and Quincy became the first home of the World Free Fall Convention. The Convention has been a success since its inception, and has continued to attract individuals from all fifty of the United States, and from forty-six other countries as well.
- b. Did it start earlier than 1990?
 - i. An article in the QHW said that a skydiver Rob Culver was making his 4th trip to Quincy Municipal Airport for the WFFC. (suggesting 1986 was the start)
 - ii. Later in 1993 after the first death it was said that the first convention was held in 1986
 - iii. Talks in a future world record attempt that a formation from 1988 held the world record at Quincy.
- c. Cost to skydive
 - i. \$700 for a mult-day AFF school.
 - ii. \$159 for a tandem jump for first time jumpers.
 - iii. \$39 for a single jump out of a helicopter.
 - iv. \$79 for a single jump out of a hot air balloon.
 - v. \$170 for a standard ten pack standard jump package.

If you want to jump, you will need a type "B" license, which is proof that you took the AFF training and 50 jumps. You will also need membership to "AMPU", which you can buy for \$8.

- d. Economic Impact to the city
 - i. 1991 estimates were between 1 to 1.75 million economic impact for the city.
 - ii. About half the sky divers in 1991 stayed in hotel rooms
 - iii. Restaurants saw large increases in patrons during the convention

3. Events throughout the years

- a. 1990
 - i. C – 130 was the special attraction for the convention
 - ii. Douglas DC-3 which was once owned by actor John Travolta
 - iii. Cousins and aunt were interviewed in an article
- b. 1991

- i. Things for spectators to do:
 - 1. Bungee Jumping added (costs was \$59)
 - ii. First bad storm hits during event
 - 1. 75 mph winds associated with a storm hit the airport around 5:30 pm on August 18th
 - 2. 10 people were injured
 - a. Most injuries were from falling tent poles and debris from falling tents
 - 3. Several people believed they actually saw a tornado
 - iii. The public could get into the VIP area where all the sky divers were located for \$8
 - iv. Planes: C-130, DC-3,
- c. 1992
- i. Planes: C-130, DC-3, B-17 Bomber, Huey Helicopter, 6 turbine aircraft and ...
 - 1. First time a Boeing 727 was used for jumps
 - a. Don Kirlin was quoted in the paper saying "Only one person has ever jumped out of a 727 jet, hijacker D.B. Cooper 20 years ago." (1971)
 - i. In a 1993 article Kirlin stats that he was "DB Cooper No 2." After being the 2nd person to jump out of a 727 in history.
 - ii. Also said "Because the jet door is small, sky divers will land 'all over the area'"
 - 2. The 727 could hold well over 200 sky divers
 - 3. The cost to jump out of the jet was \$55/jump
 - 4. Quincy was the only place in the world you could sky dive from a 727
 - ii. Spectator attractions
 - 1. Tandam jumps (\$140)
 - 2. Bungee Jumping (\$49)
 - 3. Helicopter ride (\$18)
 - 4. Hot-air Balloon Ride (\$125 for up to 2 hours)
 - 5. Human Gyro-machine
 - a. Designed by NASA to simulate weightlessness
 - iii. \$15 for a VIP pass that got you in for the evening entertainment
- d. 1993
- i. New spectator attraction: open cockpit bi-plane rides (\$25)
 - ii. The 727 made its second return to Quincy for one day only
 - iii. Concerns about decreased numbers due to the flood ended up being nothing
- e. 1994
- i. Aircraft: 12 fixed-wing, 3 helicopters, 3 hot air balloon.
 - 1. Boeing 727 made its return along with an new Super Constellation
 - 2. The Family Channel Blimp was brought in for skydivers to jump from.
 - ii. The Discovery Channel did filming for a documentary
 - iii.
 - iv. Spectator attractions: Wind Tunnel (\$16), Helicopter Rides (\$16), Hot Air Balloon Rides (\$125) Tandem Jumps (\$159) and new this year was the Sky Coaster.
- f. 1995
- i. Rain falls were so bad that the city of Quincy had to spread hundreds of tons of gravel to make temporary "streets" in the skydiver areas.
 - ii. For the 1st time the 727 jet dropped skydivers out from 30k feet
 - iii. After controlling the skies and ground for 4 years the National Guard brings in a radar unit to keep an eye on aircraft in the sky during the event.
 - iv. Spectator events: Wind Tunnel, Orbitron Space Ball, Trampoline Thing, paintball, rides in hovercraft, hot air balloon, helicopter and antique bi-plane

- v. It was calculated that a plane was taking off or landing every 1 minute 35 seconds during the convention.
- g. 1996
 - i. Skydiving injuries skyrocket with Blessing reporting 34 total injuries, doubling reports from 1994
 - ii. For the first time in the conventions history an ambulance is stationed at the airport.
 - iii. Calculation of take-offs and landing beat last years average down to 1 minute 18 seconds.
- h. 1997
 - i. Registered skydivers continued to climb beating the previous year by over 1,200 people
- i. 1998
 - i. This is were we start getting some interesting stats.
 - 1. 76 units of blood donated
 - 2. 503 tandem jumps made (most ever)
 - 3. 434 kegs of beer drank
- j. 1999
 - i. Most jumps made in the history of the WFFC at more than 69k
 - ii. 412 kegs of beer drank
- k. 2000
 - i. Another severe storm swept thru the airport.
 - 1. 11 people were injured by falling tents and debris
 - 2. Wind reports from the airport had gusts at 35 miles per hour
 - 3. About a third of the 65 tents went down including the main tent.
 - ii. High-speed passes in a Casa (Spanish plain aka c-212)
 - iii. Media attention began focusing more on safety as the years went on.
 - 1. Two articles in the QHW were specifically about security at the WFFC
 - a. One article was titled "Think you can sneak into the Free Fall?"
 - iv. In an effort to increase safety, the public was not allowed free access to the skydiver camping area.
 - v. live video streaming of what was going on at the convention began for 10 hours a day. The effort was headed up by the convention organizers, and a few other businesses.
- l. 2001
 - i. Attendance was significantly down (3,244 skydivers vs 5,732 in 2000)

4. World Record attempts

- a. 1988 – 144 sky diver formation that was set in 1988 at Quincy Airport
 - i. Took 11 attempts to establish the record
 - ii. Record held in Guinness Book of World Records till 1992 when it was topped by a 200 person formation in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina
- b. 1990 – 154 sky dive formation was thwarted due to plane issues on one day and bad weather the next. (They did complete an 151 person formation that year but had designated the 154 person formation for the world record)
- c. 1991
 - i. 100 jumpers attempted to form a large star
 - ii. 89 jumpers will attempt 2 different formations before opening their parachutes
 - iii. 68 jumpers attempt 3 different formations before opening their chutes
- d. 1992
 - i. 100 sky divers attempt to hook up and create three sequential formations in 60 seconds
 - ii. 60 person formation was completed then the group broke in half with each 30 person team half rotating 360 degrees before forming again.
- e. 1993
 - i. World record star formation of 60 jumpers called "Starquest 93"
 - 1. "any sky diver not doing his or her part could be cut from the team"

- f. 1994
 - i. Most Jumps from a hot air balloon at one time. (22-23 sky divers) current record was 21
 - 1. Record as of 2021 is 25 in Dubai
 - ii. A record was set of 4,020 jumps in one day (unsure if that was/is a world record)
- g. 1995
 - i. That 4,020 jumps in a day was squashed by a new one day record of 4,831 on August 5th. That record was then beat on Aug 9th setting the record at 5,875.
 - 1. No less than 20 jumpers in the air every three minutes for 14 hours
 - ii. Attempt to beat the 200 person formation set in South Carolina with 205-215 people.
 - 1. This was given up on 2 days after the convention ended due to low numbers of seasoned jumpers.
 - iii. Two other world record attempts were to be made after the convention ended.
- h. 2000
 - i. Two records achieved
 - 1. 18 Way Hoop Dive
 - 2. 27 Bobs on the Bob-way

5. Deaths

- a. 1986
 - i. Aug 16th
 - 1. Jay Zvorist 36 of Los Angeles and Mark Brengman, 25, of Fremont California died when their parachutes became tangled and they plunged 100 feet to the ground.
- b. 1993
 - i. Aug 14th
 - 1. Two skydivers were breaking away from a formation when they collided with each other when opening their chutes.
 - a. Craig Sharp received serious injuries and was transported to Blessing. Injuries consisted of a broken leg, hip, arm, ribs, back, and a separated collarbone.
 - i. Spent 5 weeks in the hospital recovering
 - ii. "It was great to get in the wheel-chair (after being on his back for 4 wks), but you can't get around too good with one leg and one arm. You go in a circle."
 - b. John Hastings, 37 years old was pronounced dead on the scene due to massive head injuries.
 - i. Don Kirilin said that they were facing each other at the same altitude and when the canopies opened they surged up and towards each other hitting each other between 30 and 40 mph. Both men were knocked unconscious.
 - ii. Hastings began an uncontrolled decent and crashed through the side of a camper
 - iii. Sharps canopy jammed after the collision and he began a spiraling descent and landing in a field across from highway 104 from the airport.
 - iv. Sharp came back in 1994 and continued skydiving making close to 20 jumps while in Quincy that year.
- c. 1994 (a day after Craig Sharps interview comes out in the Herald Whig)
 - i. August 6th
 - 1. Doug Dekker, 38 of Sunnyvale Ca, crash lands and dies in hospital
 - a. Hooked up parachute backwards
 - b. Made a tight turn close to the ground and hit ground extremely hard
 - c. Dies at Blessing Hospital of multiple internal injuries
 - d. Had close to 200 jumps before accident
- d. 1996
 - i. Aug 6th

1. 47 year old James Hammock of Sequin, Texas died of injuries when he collided with another diver as their parachutes opened.
 2. He landed in a field across Highway 104 from the airport.
 - ii. Aug 6th (later that day)
 1. 46 year old Harold Fisher from Toledo, OH was found drowned in a small inflatable swimming pool near tent city. He was pronounced dead at 10:55pm by the Coroner.
 2. First non-skydiving related death
 - iii. 1996 was the worst year for injuries. With Blessing hospital reporting 34. Not since 1991's wind storm had there been as many injuries reported. (10 skydivers came in on one day)
- e. 1997
- i. Aug 2nd
 1. 27 Year old Luis Herrera died during surgery at Blessing Hospital. He was injured while attempting to land near the Plainville Blacktop about a mile south of 104. The accident occurred across the road from Pleasant Grove Church.
 2. Herrera apparently was attempting to avoid power lines when he landed on a steep hill and broke both of his legs.
 3. He had 413 parachute jumps to his credit
 - ii. Aug 3rd
 1. 58 year old Bob Surles of Pullman, Washington died in surgery at Springfield Memorial Hospital.
 2. Surles made a sudden turn close to the ground and lost control slamming into a camper in tent city around 3pm on August 3rd.
 3. He had 202 parachute jumps to his credit.
 - iii. Aug 3rd – Michael Vederman
 1. In a miracle Micheal Vederman collided with another parachute 80 feet in the air causing him to loose control and fall to the ground. He hit the concrete pavement nearly face down.
 2. Mike broke both femurs, both knees, left kneecap, left elbow, lower and upper jaw, nose, eye socket, and more. He also lost 19 teeth but survived.
 3. Deadmike.com
 - iv. A skydiver was hit by a car while walking near the airport and another one suffered leg injuries when he landed on the pavement instead of grass.
- f. 1998
- i. Aug 14th
 1. 29 year old Jerry Loftis died when his parachute failed to open.

6. Sky Diving Stats in Quincy

- a. During the convention, skydivers averaged 5 jumps per day in good weather
- b. WFFC, according to Don Kirlin, was three times bigger then the next largest convention held in Europe and 10 times bigger than the next largest one in the US.
- c. For many years Quincy was the 2nd busiest airport in Illinois and in the top 20 in the US during the convention
 - i. By 1994 the WFFC was making more jumps in one day then any other convention in the United states would for their whole event.

7. The Wild Part

- a. Can't jump when its cloudy or raining, what do you do?
 - i. Go into town
 - ii. Night Jumps
 1. In 1995 Kirlin told the QHW that they stopped doing night jumps because there was too many people.
- iii. Tent City
 1. Setup to the north of the airport

2. "Special" entertainment every night
3. In a 1996 article, the reporter said that Tent City was one of "Adams counties largest towns"
4. The gravel paths or roads were all named after notable people like DB Cooper or geographical names like Drop Zone Lane, or Quincy Street.
5. It had public transportation
 - a. Sky divers could get on small trailers hauled by pickup trucks that drove them to loading zones
6. It had its own radio station, which was heavy on classic rock
7. It had a business district complete with services so sky divers didn't have to drive to Quincy.
 - a. Sewing services
 - b. Laundry services for skydivers
 - c. Food including things like cappuccinos and ostrich burgers.
 - d. Golf cart rentals
- b. All newspaper articles and advertisements state that skydiving started every day at 8 am, but that wasn't true.
 - i. Naked Diving & Lingerie Diving
- c. 2000 Police Crackdown
 - i. 1997 security included 40 officers on 24-hour patrol.
 - ii. QPD, Adams County Sheriffs office, and State police also patrolled the area.

8. The Death of WFFC in QCY

- a. Kerlin and Ebbing never put on a skydive convention before but the skydiving community was very impressed saying in an article in Parachutist Magazine:
 - i. "It is hard to believe that two people that had never put on even a small skydiving get-together could organize and successfully orchestrate the world's largest sky diving convention."
- b. Numbers begin to fall
 - i. Mentioned earlier that 2000 had the most registered skydivers at 5,732. That number in 2001 was almost half.
 1. WFFC officials, according to skyxtreme.com blamed the decline in participants due to the poor economy and high police presence by the city.
 - ii. Police presence
 1. In that same article, it was noted that 13 arrests were made and that drug sniffing dogs were everywhere and
 2. that the boiling point was when a skydiver was arrested for resisting arrest.
 - a. According to witnesses a man was carrying a bare-breasted woman piggy-back when they were approached by officers. Witnesses said the officers used unnecessary force on the man. A skydiver intervened between the officer and the women and was arrested for interfering or obstructing justice.
 - b. Video of this encounter was available online but we could not find it today.
 3. Many complaints by skydivers of police brutality and local law enforcement being out of line with many stating they would not return to Quincy.
- c. Lawsuits
 - i. Don Kirlin brought a lawsuit against the city of Quincy on grounds that there were overzealous police that harmed their business.
 1. Lawsuit claimed that the city owed his group more than \$300k
 - a. \$250k was in reimbursements for capital improvements at the airport
 - b. \$50k was for business lost during the 2001 convention because of "excessive and unreasonable policing"
 2. The city looked to dismiss the lawsuit and was going to countersue the WFFC for \$45k that the city contended was owed for police and fire protection.
 3. Was to note that there was a 5 year agreement and that agreement ended in 2001

- ii. The Lawsuit was eventually dropped by Kirlin and the event moved to Rantoul
- d. Moving on to Rantoul
 - i. In 2002 the WFFC moved to Rantoul, IL. But it was never the same.
 - ii. 2002 registered skydivers was 2,562 and they did have 2 fatalities.
- e. Resentment
 - i. Freefall.com, which provided a lot of stats about the various years of the WFFC did a yearly review. In the first year after leaving Quincy they were pretty “pc” about leaving Quincy and moving to Rantoul. However, in the 2003 review feelings started to poke out.
 - 1. The title of the 2003 review was “So much fun, it should be illegal (and in Q****y it probably would be)
 - 2. Also says in the review “this town and DZ are much better than that Q-place, and it just seems to get better every year.