

# Cutler Bay

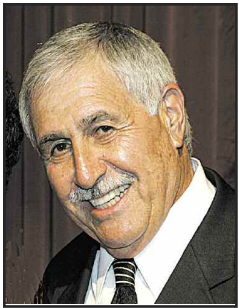
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SERVING SOUTH DADE

## There's nothing quite like taking a great leap into life

BY ERNIE SOCHIN

Vice Mayor



It was a fall from 13,200 feet above the earth — approximately two and one half miles high.

This was all done courtesy of the U.S. Army Golden Knights Parachute Team and arranged

for by a fine gentleman named Harvey Spigler, a public affairs officer with the Army.

When I was invited to jump out of this “perfectly good airplane,” I was a bit apprehensive. How could you turn down such a once-in-a-lifetime experience, but then again, who really wants to jump out of a plane and hope that everything, including the parachute, functions as they are supposed?

Well, I accepted the offer and spent a mostly sleepless night before I went down to Homestead Air Reserve base to begin my training. I was greeted by a bunch of rugged looking young men who had each jumped around four to five thousand times each and absolutely loved what they do. They showed us all the equipment that we would be hooked up to, assured us that the parachutes were top quality and that they all knew exactly what they were doing.

I jokingly asked about the guarantee that came with the parachutes and was assured that the company offered free replacement if any of them failed. I felt better about that. We were told where to place our feet when landing and what to do as we exited the plane. It all looked pretty simple and basic in the classroom.

Soon after, they began taking us out to the staging area where groups of three each got into a van to be taken to our jump

plane a short distance away. As we waited our turn we were able to watch the others jumping ahead of us. We could barely see the plane because it was so high and then someone pointed out some tiny white dots in the sky. These, we were told, were our fellow parachutists. Wow! Soon they came into view and we could actually see them.

Now it was my turn to get into the van with my instructor, SSgt. Joe Abeln from St. Louis, MO. Joe made me feel very comfortable and asked me if I was afraid of heights. I told him that on occasion I climb a ladder to change a light bulb and get a little panicky coming back down. He said that he did also. I guess this was meant to comfort me. It didn't. We drove out to the tarmac to get ready to board the plane but first I had to jump the two feet down from the van. Scary, but I made it.

Then we boarded the plane. I was told that Joe and I would be the first to jump. Joe reminded me not to leave without him. I didn't plan to. Once we got to 8,000 feet Joe began hooking me up to all the stuff that would hold us together for the tandem flight.

Now came the tough part. They actually opened this big door in the side of the airplane and Joe told me to make my way to the edge of the door ledge and not touch any part of the door, Yeah sure! Then he told me to look at the photographer who already was hanging outside the plane to photograph me on the way down.

If I had any thoughts about changing my mind they were quickly removed when Joe began counting one...two...push! I was now airborne and falling at 120 miles per hour. It might have been scary and lonely except for the fact that the photographer was falling alongside us and extended his hand so that we could lock hands and he



There is a parachute up there.

could give us a little spin on the way down. I needed that!

Finally after falling about two miles, Joe decided to open the parachute so that we could drift slowly towards the ground. He spotted a cloud below us with a circular rainbow on it created by the sun. In the middle of the circle was our shadow. Joe thought it might be fun to pass right through the circle. We (Joe) did it perfectly. Again, wow!

The rest was easy. We located the little “X” that we were to land on and came in right on target.

I was told that the high that you get from such an experience lasts for several days. My endorphins are still being released two days later as I write this. I came away from it all with a tremendous admiration for our Army guys and gals. If these are examples of whom are defending us, we have nothing to fear but fear itself. (Gee, I wish I had said that!)

Note:

Actual video is available on YouTube at <http://tinyurl.com/7tm6yyu>.