Stags Take to the Skies for Guide Dogs

A group of Cheltenham stags took to the skies last weekend to raise money for Guide Dogs as a tribute to the groom's mother.

Julian Townsend, 37, from Cheltenham, and his fiancée Joanne are getting married in December. Sadly, Julian's mother Gloria, who was registered blind, died earlier this year. During her life she had been a great supporter of Guide Dogs and Julian wanted her memory to live on.

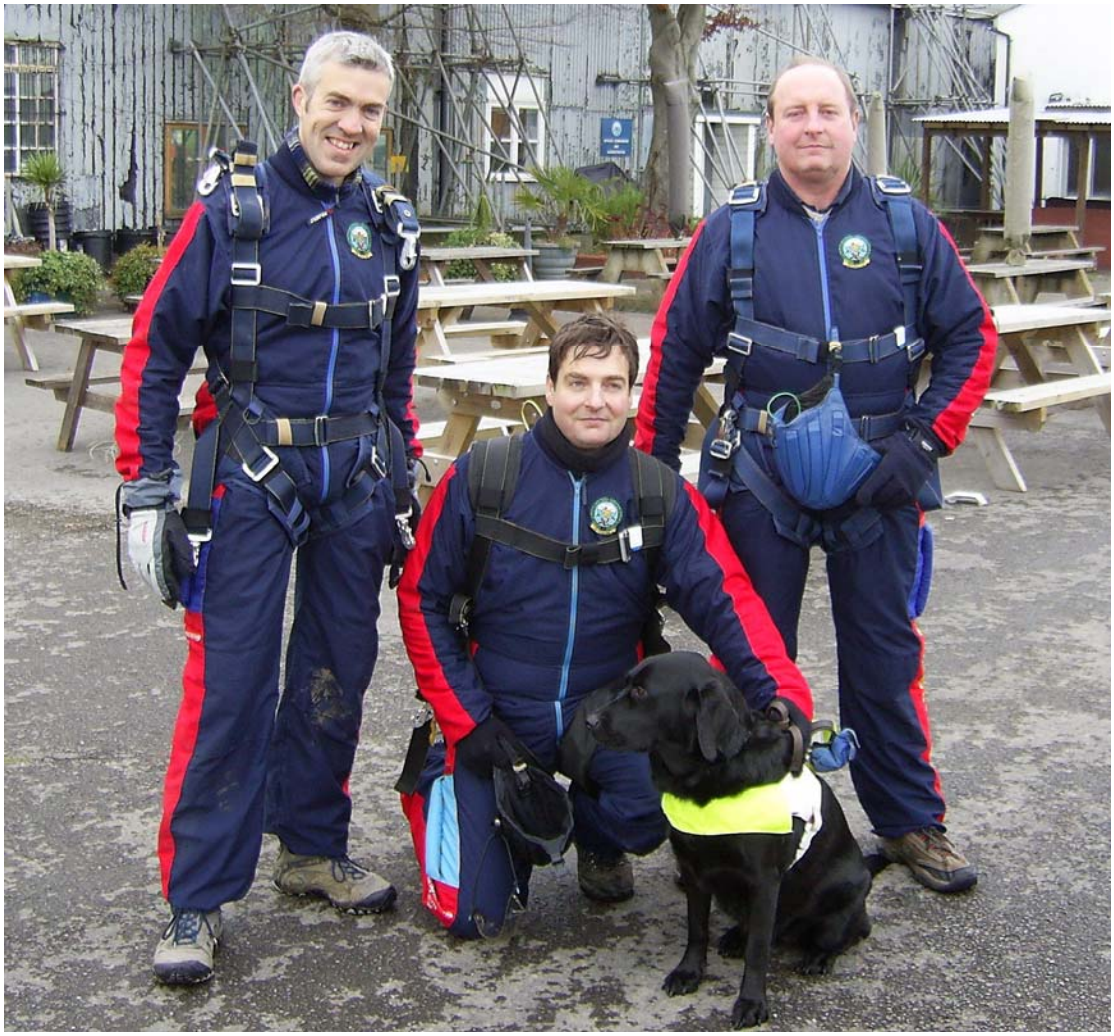
So Julian, who works as a Design and Build Coordinator with Britannia Construction in Staverton, persuaded 11 of his friends to spend his stag weekend on a sponsored skydive through the Army Parachute School at Netheravon in Wiltshire. Each stag was attached to an experienced parachutist in a tandem jump, freefalling for 45 seconds from a height of 12,000 feet, before a graceful descent beneath the parachute and stunning views for miles around.

Friends and supporters watched the action from the ground. These included Julian's sister Marcia, another Guide Dogs volunteer who cares for the animals if their owners need to go into hospital. With the money still to be collected, it is hoped that the jump will have raised £5,000.

Speaking after the event, Julian said: "This was my first and probably last jump. The moment the aeroplane door opened I realised this wasn't one of my better ideas, but as the pilot couldn't land with me on board - out I went. Five minutes later I was safely back on terra-firma, feeling sick yet exhilarated. But five minutes of terror for me equates to support and help for blind and partially sighted people all across the UK, so it has all been worthwhile."

Anyone wishing to contribute to Guide Dogs should visit their website at www.guidedogs.org.uk for details of the various ways this can be done.

Caption:
Julian Townsend (centre) flanked by his brother and best man Ashley (left) and friend Tim (right), along with Guide Dog Rachel.



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