

Team Hope:

300 Perfect Jumps for Parkinson's

When most people talk about raising awareness, events like 5K walks or golf tournaments often pop up. But that expression has taken on a whole new meaning for Kevin Burkart, of Prior Lake, Minnesota, who will take on the challenge to skydive 300 times in one day on June 19 to increase Parkinson's awareness.



Inspired by his father, Gary, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 1999 at the age of 60, Burkart has learned to stand strong. "My father was diagnosed on the cusp of retirement, so I thought it was a pretty sad story for him," said the life-long doer, who opened his own marketing agency, StepStoneGroup, 16 years ago, and started competitive skydiving several years later. "But he showed me that regardless of what ailment you're suffering from, don't give up."

Five years ago, Burkart wanted to put his talents to work helping other families facing similar challenges so he became what he calls a "charitable leader." "Even as the second most common neurodegenerative disease, it's a very quiet, silent disease," he said. "So I think it's up to people like myself to toot the horn and get more discussion going on behalf of this humble demographic."

So far, Burkart's attention-grabbing hobby is paying off. In June 2008, he completed 100 skydives in a single day, raising \$48,000 for Parkinson's. Two years later, he returned to the skies to perform 150 skydives, raising over \$68,000. Now, in this final tribute, he's shooting for some ambitious goals: 300 jumps and \$100,000.

For Burkart and his crew—10 parachute rig packers, two pilots and a host of volunteers—the event will begin in the early hours of the morning and wrap up some 19 hours



Kevin Burkart is ready for the final tribute.

later. He'll use two airplanes. Once in the air, he'll climb to 2,000 feet in 45 seconds (a typical skydive is from 13,000 feet and takes 15 minutes to ascend to altitude), exit the plane and complete a jump every three minutes.

Above all, Burkart hopes to make each dive a moving tribute.

"I would really like to have every jump dedicated to one person's story who is struggling with Parkinson's disease or who has passed away from Parkinson's disease," Burkart said.

Throughout the event, a professional announcer will read the dedication for each jump.

Burkart and his team of volunteers are pulling out all the stops. "I'm sure it will go well. I've got a great crew, and we know it can be executed safely," he said. "The people I am surrounded with during this skydiving event—including the skydiving community, the Parkinson's community, my family and friends and my business associates—are extraordinary people. They're taking the opportunity to lift up those around them and make their community better."

Proceeds from this event will benefit the NPF and the NPF Chapter in Minnesota.

To learn more about 300 Perfect Jumps visit www.perfectjumps.com.

To learn more about how you can begin your own NPF community fundraising event, please visit www.parkinson.org/teamhope.