

## Skydiving, through the eyes of the instructor



At Midwest Freefall, individuals can skydive in groups. COURTESY/ART FARLEY

BY KATERINA MIHAILIDIS  
OU News Bureau

Jumping out of an airplane can be an intense experience. It's an unnatural act that can leave even experienced skydivers with butterflies at the airplane's door.

Art Farley, a skydiving instructor with over 3,000 skydives, still remembers his first experience.

"I was apprehensive, nervous, excited, like 'What the hell am I doing here?'" he said.

Tim Bochenek's first time skydiving was a mixture of excitement and anxiety.



Tim Bochenek retired from skydiving with more than 1,000 jumps. COURTESY/TIM BOCHENEK

"The thing that describes that experience is that you're completely overwhelmed," he said.

He performed his first fall by himself in a static-line jump, which is where the parachute automatically deploys at a set height. He recalls going through all the what-if situations in his mind during his first jump.

"That's where the anxiety for me came in," he added.

Bochenek, a research engineer, was once a skydiving coach, jump master and instructor.

He started skydiving at the age of 29, in Tecumseh, Michigan. With eight years of experience, Bochenek retired from the sport in 2007 due to a neck injury, having reached more than 1,000 jumps. He now lives in Holland, Michigan.

Farley began skydiving in 2005. His first experience, a tandem skydive, was a gift from his wife for his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. As experienced as he is, Farley still gets butterflies in his stomach right at the airplane's door.

"No matter how many times you do it, it's not a natural thing to step out of an airplane," Farley said.

Farley lives in Macomb Township and works at the [Midwest Freefall](#) Skydiving drop zone in Ray, Michigan. He coaches and instructs students through accelerated freefalls. A videographer for the drop zone, he documents customers' experiences.

He doesn't see a time where he won't be skydiving.

When Midwest Freefall Skydiving is closed during the winter, Farley works in the health care industry as a field service engineer.

"Skydivers are all different types," Farley said.

### To be an instructor...

Becoming an instructor gave Farley the benefit of working at a drop-zone, which paid him to practice his hobby. His instructional rating allows him to experience more thrilling dives. When he dives with inexperienced first-timers Farley can become equally as excited and as nervous as they are.

"If I take somebody up for skydiving that's never done it before, I mean, that's a person that's quite energetic, the adrenalin's up and pumping, they're excited and stuff," he said. "You can't help it, kind of feed off of that energy a bit."

A skydiving instructor has to be "extremely aware" of their surroundings, according to Bochenek.

"You got to be able to manage the student and make sure that they stay calm and aware in an emergency situation," Bochenek said.

Farley said that clarity of mind is crucial in diving and instructing. An instructor should be honest, outgoing, friendly and ready to face a new challenge.

"You can't let yourself be distracted, especially as an instructor," Farley said. "The fall only lasts 60 seconds, and for those 60 seconds nothing else exists except for that skydive."

### Skydiving and injuries

Both Bochenek and Farley have had close calls.

"I wouldn't say it was a close call, it was a call," Farley said, referring to when he experienced a rough landing resulting in him getting a compression fracture of his vertebrae.



Art Farley said he never sees a time where he won't be skydiving. He is an accelerated freefall instructor at Midwest Freefall Skydive in Ray. COURTESY/ART FARLEY

"For about six weeks I was walking around with a torso hard brace around my chest to support my back," Farley said.

Bochenek has been in more than one emergency situation. With smoke in the airplane's cockpit at about 5,000 feet, he had to guide his student through a premature jump. Bochenek and his student followed the pilot's instructions and exited the plane. The pilot successfully landed the plane and no one got hurt.

"Injuries are not something you're going to be able to get away from just because of what the sport does involve," Farley said.

The twisting or braking of the ankle is the most common injury because "it's not the freefall that hurts you, it's the sudden stop."

Farley mentioned a fact found in [Quora](#) stating that skydiving 17 times in a year is equivalent to driving 10,000 miles in a car when it comes to the risk of dying.

He added that by taking into account the number of skydivers, the number of injuries or fatalities is minimal. In 2016, there were about 20 registered injuries out of almost 3 million or 4 million skydives.

"We do have ... set rules, guidelines, set procedures, for what we do," Farley said. "We take it seriously. Everybody wants to keep skydiving and we keep wanting to see our friends come back."

Skydiving can be done year-round, according to Bochenek. There are a few limitations.

"In the wintertime, it's mostly how cold are you willing to go out there and do this, and do the pilots and people who own the planes want the planes to fly in cold conditions," Bochenek said.

Midwest Freefall Skydiving closes during the winter because of slow customer traffic and low temperatures. In the winter, the days are shorter, making it harder for people to get away from work, Farley added.

"As a general rule of thumb, it gets about 3 degrees colder every 1,000 feet you go up," Farley said. "Then, throw in a 120-mile wind chill because that's about the speed you're reaching in freefall."

Skydiving is not an activity you can force yourself to do, according to Bochenek.

"If it's interesting and it sounds interesting to you, I would absolutely go and do it, but if it doesn't, I wouldn't try to convince you that you should try," he said.



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