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Skydive Perris Hosts National Championships



Parachutists fall to earth from the skies of Perris during the U.S. National Skydiving Championships. The body of water in the photo is Lake Perris.

Perris became the center of the skydiving universe as 700 parachutists from around the country and the globe flocked to the City to take part in the 2017 U.S. National Skydiving Championships.

Skydive Perris, the City's parachuting center, is a world-class facility sought by elite skydivers from the U.S. and the rest of the world. Elite military jumpers as well as top civilian skydivers love the large landing zone around Perris Skydiving, the great facilities, top-notch instructors and usually perfect weather.

This year marks the first time since 2003 that the U.S. Nationals have taken place in Perris.

The competition, which began last week, continues until Sunday and includes formation falling in groups of four, eight, 10 and 16 parachutists—plus another skydiver videoing their descent from 12,500-feet. While falling members of the formation execute a number of twist, turns and choreographed dance-like moves—including falling head-first to earth—within about 45 seconds. Judges then view the video and issue a score.

Other disciplines incorporated into the 2017 Nationals wing-suiting, artistic falling and speed skydiving.



John Blackburn and Chazi Blacksher, members of an Arizona skydiving team, talk about the thrill of parachuting shortly after landing at the drop zone in Perris.

Nancy Koreen, a skydiver with 8,500 jumps who is handling publicity for the Nationals, called parachuting the ultimate expression of freedom.

"Falling feels really cool," said Koreen, who flew in from Virginia to be part of the 2017 Nationals.

Elite skydivers, Koreen said, always push themselves to master new maneuvers even as they fall to earth at speeds of 120 mph or more.

"There's always something new to learn and you try to do things you've never done in the air before," she said.

Chazi Blacksher and John Blackburn are teammates from Skydive Arizona and were among the first competitors taking part in group formation parachuting. Blacksher, who has parachuted 4,000 times, said nothing equals the thrill she experiences as she steps out the airplane door and begins her earthward descent.

"It's the best second of my life!" she said. "It's an amazing feeling. Nothing else I've ever done replicates that feeling."

Blackburn said he's laser-focused on the upcoming routine as he flies out of the airplane. He's logged 5,000 skydives.

"Everything else goes away," he said. "No troubles, no worries."

Like other parachutists arriving in the City, Blackburn said he appreciates what Skydive Perris offers to beginning, intermediate and elite jumpers who together log about 100,000 skydives a year.

"It's all great," he said. "The weather, the facilities, the world-class instructors you can learn from—the best in the world," he said.

Comments like that please co-owner Melanie Conatser, whose family has operated the parachutist paradise for 41 years. She said support from the City of Perris helps maintain its reputation as the go-to place for skydiving fun. Conatser is a skydiver as well as business owner. She's logged 6,000 parachute jumps.

"We can't thank the City of Perris enough," she said. "We are friends with the City!"



Melanie Conatser, one of the owners of Skydive Perris, discusses the ongoing U.S. National Skydiving Championships at the parachuting center on Goetz Road in Perris.

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