



Female Skydivers Mark Centenary of Women's Suffrage

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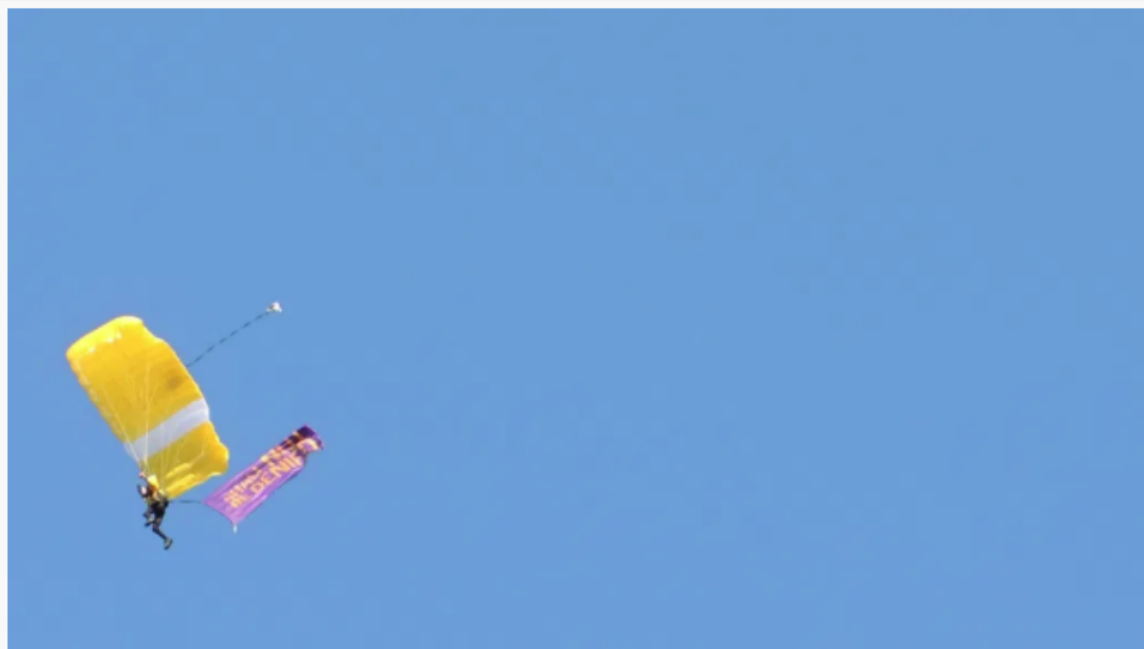


Melanie Curtis, Amy Chmeleck, Kaz Sheeky and Sara Curtis of the Highlight Pro Skydiving Team celebrate the centenary of women's suffrage with a 4,500-foot skydive, landing on Woodlawn Cemetery in Aug. 26, 2020.

Photo by Miriam Quinones

At first glance, the relationship between skydiving, a woman's right to vote, and Woodlawn Cemetery might not seem obvious. On Aug. 26 though, four members of the Highlight Pro Skydiving Team parachuted from helicopters 4,500 feet in the sky onto the grounds of the cemetery and placed a yellow rose at the gravesite of suffragist, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and other pioneering women.

Other celebrations took place across the country on the same day to commemorate the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution which secured the right to vote for women.



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In Manhattan, a monument to women's rights pioneers, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was unveiled inside Central Park. However, because City regulations prohibit skydivers from landing in the park, and because of COVID-19 safety measures, the unveiling ceremony was limited to a crowd of 50 people.

Nonetheless, historian, Susan Olsen, wanted to ensure that Woodlawn Cemetery would play a part in the day's celebratory activities. She worked with administrators at the Woodlawn Conservancy and Coline Jenkins-Sahlin, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's great-great-granddaughter, to make the skydiving event a reality.



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“What we wanted to do is to celebrate the fact that Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Carrie Chapman Catt, and Alva Belmont, three of the primary figures who fought for women's rights and the right to vote, are here at Woodlawn,” Olsen said.

On the day itself, the first two skydivers glided on to the grounds of Woodlawn, while wearing cannisters strapped to their ankles that created a smoke stream of purple and yellow, colors associated with the suffragist movement. They were followed by the second two skydivers who glided through the air flying banners inscribed with the words, “Shall Not Be Denied” and, “Equality Can’t Wait.”



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Sara Curtis holds 18 world records and has jumped more than 14,000 times. She sees her skydiving activities as a way of bringing attention to the history of women, including the struggle endured by women to obtain the right to vote. “Purple, white, and yellow were the colors of the suffragist movement from 1900 to the 1920, and they did all sorts of amazing media campaigns,” said Curtis. “That’s what really helped the suffragist movement.”

The event, which took many months of planning, was live-streamed on Facebook without advanced notice of the specific location in order to keep crowds from gathering.



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Team member, Kaz Sheeky, has over 10,000 jumps on her resume, but saw something unique about the centenary event. "We got to fly over Alva Belmont's mausoleum which, to me, is like super special," Sheeky said. "It was super thrilling."

In addition to the suffragists, Woodlawn Cemetery is the final resting place of many other prominent figures in American history, from Herman Melville, author of *Moby Dick*, to jazz innovator, Miles Davis, to Fiorello LaGuardia, mayor of New York during The Great Depression.

With the current attention given to the 100th anniversary of the passing of the 19th Amendment, Woodlawn is making sure that visitors know the contribution made to the world by some of the women interred there. They now publish a special map directing visitors to 27 gravesites on the 400-acre cemetery for what administrators there describe as "a historic and inspiring visit to the final resting places of these extraordinary women."

For her part, Olsen, being a historian, said it was important to bring attention to the continuing struggle of all people in protecting and extending rights. "Any attention we can get at this time in our lives for the rights of others, we should do it." she said.



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Photo by Miriam Quinones