



Skydiving in Marin???



If you aren't already aware, a tandem skydiving operation has applied for a business permit to operate here at Gnos Field. Yep, that's right-a skydiving operation. And you know where they plan to land? Near the helipad, inside the pattern. Here at Gnos, where the winds change at a moment's notice and threaten to rip the windsack with their intensity. Right in the midst of all that traffic coming through the valley to and from Petaluma, and waay overhead going into SFO and OAK, or coming out of Napa. Over the course of the last few months we've heard every reason possible for NOT allowing this group to operate here, most of which are seemingly valid.

Many of you called, wrote and spoke to us in person asking that GFCFA do everything possible to oppose this move, and an equal number made equally-good arguments for why we NEED and want this new operation at Gnos. After deliberation, your board has decided NOT to take a position either for or against Michael Knight and his Golden Gate Skydiving operation. Here's why:

First of all, the association's articles of incorporation and bylaws are pretty strict on this type of advocacy. We could have opposed it on the grounds that it will affect safety, but ultimately that's the FAA's call (this will be explained later on). Secondly, we do not have a clear "mandate" from our membership, which appears to be truly split on this issue. Why not take a vote anyway, you say?

Well, the fact of the matter is that because our airport receives funding from the FAA, the airport must honor several grant assurances and cannot discriminate against any type of legitimate aviation activity. And yes, that includes parachuting. The ONLY way the FAA would allow an airport sponsor to allow such "economic discrimination" would be for safety reasons.

Now, before you bring up all those safety arguments about how special conditions are here at Gnos, remember that parachuting schools and businesses are currently operating at 26 public airports (the ones receiving federal money) in California. And while we all know Marin is special, several of those parachuting operations land next to the runway, inside the pattern. This is nothing new, and it's all kosher in the eyes of the FAA, which makes it kind of tough to argue that it can't work here at Gnos.

What about those crazy winds, you say. Surely nobody has the kind of winds we do here at Gnos. Mr. Knight's response to that? Parachutes ALWAYS land into the wind. And you know that there's a parachute operation at Byron, right? Downwind of all those windmill farms?

The Marin County Aviation Commission, which has the authority to recommend or decline to recommend any business application to the Board of Supervisors for approval, had sent Mr. Knight back to the drawing board on three different occasions, asking him each time for additional commitments to assure safe-

ty (in their minds). They said "sure, we'll recommend approval of your request, just promise you won't jump in winds of 20 knots or more". When he agreed to that, they asked for a plan for recovering off-field landings, and when he came up with that they asked for WRITTEN approval of all the adjacent landowners to come on their property if he did land off the airport. In effect, they drew a line in the sand and moved it. Twice.

At that point Mr. Knight went to the FAA's San Francisco Airports District office for advice. As a result of his discussions of the situation with the FAA, he has filed a Part 13 informal complaint against the County for economic discrimination, and based on the thorough complaint he filed he stands a pretty good chance to win his appeal. The County has 30 days to respond; how do you think this is going to end?

Me, too. I say we meet him at the door, give him a warm welcome and a GFCFA membership kit.

-Ken Mercer, President GFCFA