

# Walkers carry parachutes to support legislation



STAFF PHOTO/STAN HOWE

Melanie Tetlock, whose brother Gareth Rodgers was killed skydiving in Georgina three years ago trains for a walk from Barrie through Ballantrae to Georgina to gather support for new regulations on the sport.

## Event held in memory of Stouffville skydiver

Gareth Rodgers was a perfectionist and, according to a military parachute expert called during the inquest into his death, a man who "did everything that he possibly could to save his own life".

Mr. Rodgers, a 38-year-old Sutton resident and father of three, fell 3,200 feet to his death just outside Baldwin Aug. 25, 2002, after his main and reserve parachutes malfunctioned.

In an attempt to make the sport safer, Mr. Rodgers' sister, Melanie Tetlock, said she is determined to maintain the government's attention and to bring a stronger public awareness for the serious risks associated with parachuting.

"Most of us limit our consideration of risk within this sport to the sole act of jumping from an airplane. Without regulation, it is absolutely conceivable that a parachute rig may, in fact, be improperly maintained. It is also an alarmingly real possibility that some of those with whom the students entrust their very lives, may exhibit questionable behaviour as was suggested during my brother's case," she said.

Ms Tetlock, an Innisfil resident, has walked hundreds of kilometres between Barrie and Innisfil in preparation for the GRASP walk to remember.

Having founded the Gareth Rodgers Act for Sport Parachuting in 2004, she dons a partially active parachute as part of her daily personal training regimen.

With the main canopy removed, the container unit and reserve chute weigh

just under 20 pounds. She carries it 10 to 20 kilometres a day.

Former Canadian Sport Parachute Association (CSPA) magazine editor Allen Roulston currently practices a similar training schedule from his home town of Ottawa, as he prepares to support this latest GRASP initiative.

The 73.5-kilometre walk is intended to get the government to move more quickly to regulate sport parachuting.

Walkers will also invite additional signatures on their petition supporting Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford MPP Joe Tascona's GRASP Bill 87.

Introduced by Mr. Tascona in June 2004, the bill would regulate free-falling in Ontario.

### INQUEST

Mr. Rodgers' inquest suggested systemic inadequacies and lack of accountability, or an adequate means of enforcing rules and regulations within the sport parachuting industry.

Mr. Roulston, who holds numerous skydiving certifications, alleges unprofessional conduct within various drop zones (skydiving centres). He ended his association with the CSPA after repeated attempts to rectify safety issues fell on deaf ears.

"The CSPA has compiled documentation outlining the best parachuting practices. However, CSPA does not in any way attempt to ensure that its member drop zones follow these practices. Despite the fact that CSPA is aware, its member drop zones often deviated from CSPA rules. CSPA has refused to accept the role of compliance, monitoring and enforcement,"

Mr. Roulston said.

The trip will begin at 7:30 a.m. Aug. 23 and move south from Big Bay Point Road and Yonge Street in Barrie. Under police escort, the advocates for skydiving safety will be followed for three consecutive days by Mr. Rodgers' widow, Lisa.

Encouraging supporters to stop them along the way, their itinerary will also include a one-hour rest stop and petition signing in the parking lot of Newmarket's Upper Canada Mall.

Resuming their trek east on Davis Drive to Hwy. 48, the pair will then head north and arrive at their final destination just north of Old Homestead Road in the Baldwin hayfield where Mr. Rodgers plunged to his death.

As former Stouffville residents, Ms Tetlock and Ms Rodgers will detour slightly south on Hwy. 48, where they will be met at the Country Stop in Ballantrae by Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Sue Sherban.

They are also expecting a show of support from area residents with whom they and Gareth once lived and went to school.

Mr. Tascona has extended a formal invitation to all mayors bordering this journey to participate. Georgina Mayor Rob Grossi has confirmed he will be joining.

Donations in support of future GRASP initiatives can be made at any Scotiabank branch to Melanie Tetlock, in trust (transit # 00292), acct. No 5102785.

For more on the proposed legislation see [www.graspontario.com](http://www.graspontario.com)

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