

2015 DZ AWARDS



You have spoken. For the sixth year, we present the best drop zones in the land, according to you, Blue Skies Mag readers. Congratulations to all the winners, and cheers to another tremendous year of using life-saving devices for fun!



Best Large Drop Zone: Skydive Chicago
Runner-Up: Skydive Arizona



Best Mid-Sized Drop Zone: Chicagoland Skydiving Center
Runner-Up: Skydive Taft



Best Small/Cessna Drop Zone: Skydive Danielson
Runner-Up: Lincoln Sport Parachute Club



Best Tunnel: Paraclete XP
Runner-Up: iFly Naperville

Best Boogie: Summerfest at Skydive Chicago

Runner-Up: Carolinafest at Skydive Carolina

"Independence boogie at CSC was rad. The Beer Olympics there is one of the best boogie traditions I've ever seen."

"CPI Ellington because it was my first and we had a helicopter!"

"Fitz St. Patrick's day boogie. People and vibe are second to none."

"Lost Prairie! The traditions carried out in the beautiful valley make you never want to leave!"

"Arizona Days at Skydive Arizona. ... Not the craziest party but was an all-around best boogie."

"Skydive Arizona Holiday Boogie. ... So many planes, hot air balloon, great jump prices, amazing staff, and awesome parties and events every single night! The party on New Year's Eve is the most fun I've ever had at a DZ party."

"Skydive City's Christmas: A bunch of awesome fuckery went down."

"Freefall Adventure (Skydive Cross Keys) - FreezeFest... I feel that the less said is better. Just trust me."

"Winterfest at Skydive Dubai (it's the only boogie with the F*in Pilot)."

"M.O.A.B. Boogie! Hands down the best views with offsite jumps into the canyons, wingsuit formations, BASE jumping and HUGE bonfires and parties every night and who could forget all the skydivers taking over Sorrell River Ranch BAR and getting a round on the house! The views and people were top notch. [I'm] planning to go back every year; no wonder they call it the 'Mother of All Boogies.'"

"Tiki Bar boogie [at Skydive New England]! Best boogie with the best people and we burn the fucking bar!!!"

"The Big O Boogie [at Skydive Orange], lots and lots of hot naked woman."

"GoBig at Skydive Voltige in Quebec. All jumps were from 17,000'. Ratio of 10 jumpers per organizer, amazing boogie, so well taken care of."

"TSK Boogie at Skydive the Ranch. So many shenanigans! Great crowd, great aircraft, approx.. 50 loads per day!"

"Puerto Rico: More fun per jump. Parties every night. Sponsored by beer company (free beer). Did I mention parties every night?"

"Unfortunately, I didn't make any boogies this year. I'm going to go cry in my beer now."

Best Scenery: Skydive Sebastian

Runner-Up: Tsunami Skydivers of Oceanside

"Fly Free Skydiving, if you have a soft spot for St. Louis."

"Skydive Arizona. Some places just have all green or all brown scenery. Eloy has everything but the ocean view. We are just waiting for California to fall off into the ocean then Eloy will have everything."

"Elsinore ... In every aspect that is 'scenery' :)"

"Skydive Jurién Bay—you can't beat jumping over the beach and islands."

"Skydive Midwest (Lake Michigan, Chicago skyline, Milwaukee skyline?? Yes please!)"

"All my drop zones have shit for views."

Best Outs: Skydive Arizona

Runner-Up: Skydive Chicago

"Tons of great fields around [Chicagoland Skydiving Center]. The CRW dawgs love it there."

"Skydive Danielson has the quickest CRW dog recovery team."

Best Load Organizing: Skydive Arizona

Runner-Up: Skydive Chicago

"Skydive Perris: Best belly and wingsuit LOs in the nation. 7 days a week of LOs!"

"[Chicagoland Skydiving Center] has organizers on weekdays and weekends. Freely, wingsuit, RW, angles—it's all happening there just about every day."

"Skydive Midwest's 4-way team put on a lot of events in between their training and are always inviting less experienced jumpers to join them on skydives."

"I am really impressed with the [Skydive] Spaceland culture in that they want to grow the sport and improve on skill. [They] even have a mentor program to help the next level of jumpers coming up."

"LOs are only for people with no imagination and now [sic] people skills. So I don't use them."

Best Load Organizer: Chazi Blacksher, Skydive Arizona

Runner-Up: Steve Lefkowitz, SDC Rhythm XP

Honorable Mentions:

Remi Aguila, Skydive Arizona

Tracy Bohm, Skydive Elsinore

Mark Brown, Skydive Perris

Sandy Grillet

Luis Prineto, Team Fly4Life

Ryan Risberg, SDC Core

Jason Russell, SDC Core

Zach Sabel

"Mark Stoddart at Skydive Suffolk/iFly VA Beach ... Who doesn't like an Australian accent for debriefs?"

"Mike Wolf! One hell of an asshole!"

"I love jumping with Zach Sabel, he jumps with all skill levels and never stops smiling. I don't think he has a home DZ right now, but we should find him one."

"Any at Skydive Arizona that were at Lost Prairie."

"Chazi!!!!!!!" [For some of Chazi's load-organizing philosophies, check out page 26.]

Best for Newbies: Skydive Chicago

Runner-Up: Chicagoland Skydiving Center

"Skydive Arizona. ... The best landscape, the best LOs, the highest combined experience and probably the high[est] average experience of any drop zone."

"Freefall Adventure (Skydive Cross Keys [now closed]): It's impressive when Range—with, like, 27,000 jumps—will come up to you and give you a piece of advice on how your exit could have been better or how your landing has improved when you didn't even know he was looking. Or when swoopers like Ross and Logan, who are there training for Nationals, will take time off to help noobs when they're having a rough time packing."

"Skydive Elsinore has a good community and welcoming for both skill and friendly. All the Spacelands are doing a great job with new licenses too."

"Skydive Paraclete XP: The instructors are so friendly and amazing, they make new students feel very comfortable and confident. The atmosphere there is very warming and welcoming!"

"Skydive Paraclete XP: They have a free licensed jumper skill development program!"

"Skydive Perris, amazing staff with world class LOs in every discipline. Skydive Perris is the best for every level of skill."

"Skydive Taft. Lots of helpful instructors and fun jumpers. Good advice without the condescending attitude."

"That's a tough one, or I'm overanalyzing this question."

Best for Safety: Skydive Chicago

Runner-Up (tie):

Skydive Arizona

Chicagoland Skydiving Center

"Skydive Arizona, Bryan Burke is da man!"

"Skydive City, Zephyrhills. They won't be dicks but you'll feel like shit for being a dickhead."

"[Skydive] Elsinore. Bundy Taylor is the best S&TA ever."

"Skydive Paraclete XP! They have the best chief pilot there who knows how to keep every load safe; no one would make someone feel bad for making a mistake."

"Skydive Perris is great with Dan BC around."

"Skydive Taft. You get educated without getting schooled. The owners and instructors are all about safety and education."

"Tsunami Skydivers of Oceanside. Rich Grimm keeps it safe for everyone."

"It doesn't matter which DZ you go to. If you fuck up, someone will be a dick. Don't Fuck Up!"

"They all need some work."



Best Fleet: Skydive Chicago

Runner-Up: Skydive Arizona

"Skydive [Arizona] has the most planes (that I've seen), but Parachute Center in Lodi, CA makes a fantastic and effective use of their fleet."

"Dunkeswell, Devon have 3 Beech99s: 15,000' in 15 minutes."

"Skydive Dallas: prettiest and best maintained."

"Perris does a great job. It's hard to beat Arizona fleet but I always feel safe inside Skydive Deland's planes."

"Skydive Paraclete XP. They have two CASAs, two Super Caravans, a Twin Otter and a PAC all in mint condition."

Best Single Aircraft:

Skydive Chicago's Otter(s)

Runner-Up:

Chicagoland Skydiving Center's Otter

Honorable Mention:

West Tennessee Skydiving's King Air

"Air Force's C-17. Gets up to altitude super fast, fits many skydivers, overall tons of fun. Probably one of the most sought after planes to jump from, behind old bombers! Yes I know it's a type, but AF is the only one that has it!"

"If anyone still has a jumpable DC-3, I wish they would fly it to all the drop zones!"

"Mark Vicker's Skyvan ... just 'cause that means he's in town <3"

"Mike Mullins' King Air as far as speed goes. Skydive Balaton in Hungary has an amazing M18 helicopter that is, hands down, the best aircraft I've ever jumped from!"

"Arizona's DC-3; sometimes it even flies."

"Skydive Deland's Rocket Box. That big ugly box can climb and still looks brand new."

"One that can slow down for the CRW dawgs."

"Oh geez , which drop zone had the best toilet paper?"

Best Pilot: Dave Schwartz

Runner-Up:

John "Juice" Fuller, Skydive Elsinore

Honorable Mentions:

Karin Cawley, Skydive Arizona

Matt Kropp, Skydive the Ranch

Orion Remaniak, Chicagoland Skydiving Center

Rabbit Staib, Skydive Spaceland

Josh Sutton, Skydive Paraclete XP

Susie Taylor, Skydive Arizona

Svein Tveitnes, Skydive Dallas

Mark Vickers

Michael "Woody" Wood, Skydive Dubai

"Ant Bilsev, Skydive Elsinore. Best cuts on jump run!"

"Brian at Skydive Chicago: [I] saw him save a girl's life who was crossing the runway."

"Curtis Limbach at Skydive Midwest (pretty awesome, especially for a first-year jump pilot!)"

"Dan Lopez, Skydive Taft ... but he will fart on you."

"Doug Smith at [Chicagoland Skydiving Center]always nails the spot and has the best communication with the jumpers on the load I've ever seen."

"Juice!!! At Skydive Elsinore! His loads are on time and he gives us all the altitude he can every time. And he knows how to use the flaps and to cut on jump run."

"Skydive Paraclete XP's Chief Pilot Josh Sutton!!! I would vote him for president if I could! He's such an amazing, honest, sweet and funny pilot. He takes his job VERY serious but still can have so much fun with all of us! Plus he can fly the Casa so yeah, that makes him even more awesome."

"Karin Cawley, Skydive Arizona. Hands down Karin is the best. She does not fiddle fart around when taxiing down the runway. Everyone knows when she is pilot. You get to full altitude right now but still safe."

"Mark Borghorst from Skydive DeLand. Engine out at 300 feet and [he] still managed to turn the plane 180 degrees and landed with no injuries and no damage to the plane."

"All of them [are] doing god's work."

"That dude young dude in shorts from [Chicagoland Skydiving Center]. Fuck, I don't know his name."

Best Vibe: Skydive Chicago

Runner-Up: Chicagoland Skydiving Center

"Rapid Descent Skydiving. The jumpers there are a family like none other ... and they'll cook you food."

"I luv the open sharing of information and the relaxed friendly vibe. Skydive Arizona is a place [where] world-class skydivers are just regular people."

"Skydive City. Muff muff."

"Skydive Dallas: There is a guru for every discipline and everyone wants to jump with you."

"Skydive Danielson: The staff and jumpers are like family. Always laughing and joking and sharing stories. The place gives me warm fuzzies every time I'm there."

"Skydive Elsinore does a great job at making you feel part of the family. The view is sick and those cats know hard to party too."

"Skydive Iowa. Just feels like home."

"Skydive Jurien Bay. I sometimes just drive the 2

hours to hang out with the crew even though its crap weather!"

"Skydive Moab. It's a nice place to relax and enjoying the sky. Everyone there makes you feel at home and their knowledge and willingness to share."

"Skydive New England. Simply the best old school drop zone vibe, while having a great safety record and procedures."

"Skydive New England. It's magical."

"Skydive Paraclete XP. It truly is an awesome drop zone; they make you feel like family the second you show up, if you are a new fun jumper by yourself, someone will come find you and introduce you to everyone. You never feel alone."

"Skydive Paraclete XP: The staff, the fun jumpers, the instructors, the ground crew, and of course PK's are all really great souls and a lot (like ... A LOT) of fun."

"SKYDIVE TAFT! You just feel the vibe the second you set foot on the DZ. It is a big, awesome, welcoming family. No cliquishness at all."

"Skydive Taft. Everyone there makes you feel welcome. The instructors offer free advice, the fun jumpers chat with the tandems, and the owners are completely engaged in not only the operations but the social aspects of skydiving."

"Blue Sky Ranch. Real deal school skydiving generates its own vibe that isn't easily replicated."

"Tsunami Skydivers of Oceanside. Small enough to keep it intimate. Big enough to get a lot of loads in every time I go to jump."

"WV Skydivers. The people, staff, DZ layout and scenery. And after-hour shenanigans and great camping."

Best Locals: Skydive Chicago

Runner-Up (tie):

Chicagoland Skydiving Center

Skydive Danielson

Honorable Mentions:

Skydive Arizona

Skydive Taft

"Skydive Carolina has a great group and everyone is welcomed and it carries on after jumping into the Wolf Den. It's a home away from home for many. Not to mention, Danny and Annette Smith support their teams."

"Skydive Chicago [is] my home DZ, and should be yours too."

"At Skydive Dallas the freeflyers hug the belly flyers. Everyone gets along and are best friends."

"Skydive Delmarva. Just a great group of people—and their BeerSlap games are pretty damn epic."

"Skydive Elsinore. Very laid back and fun group of people."

"Skydive Taft. All the newbies say they love the vibe and will be back. Never a shortage of people that want to jump with you."

"No such thing."

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Best Food: Eat Up! at Skydive Chicago

Runner-Up: The Flight Deck at Chicagoland Skydiving Center

"Chris' fried chicken at Out of the Blue [Skydiving]."

"Ramblers Skydive Toogoolawah: insane pub!"

"Skydive Chicago's Eat Up! is awesome. Chicagoland Skydiving Center rivals it pretty close though."

"Skydive Midwest: There is always a cook-out on the house."

"Skydive Spaceland-Houston. Food ranges from sandwiches to tamales, homemade spaghetti, and much more!"

"I eat cotton candy for lunch."

"Really? A DZ has good food?"

Best Customer Service: Skydive Chicago

Runner-Up: Chicagoland Skydiving Center

"Skydive Dallas, they knew my name by [my] second visit (and not in a bad way)."

"Elsinore. Office girls are the best! Have been for the past 20 years!"

"Skydive Jersey. One time when I got there during a weekday the owner asked me how many jumps I was trying to do and [he] wound up splitting his tandems into six loads to make sure me and my friends got three jumps in. If they're not slammed, manifest will gladly put you on every other jump without you having to ask every time. Hell, one time when ATC dropped the ceiling to 10 [grand] they only charged us hop-and-pop rates while we were getting out at 9,500'."

"Skydive the Ranch. Lauren is the best manifest girl!"

"Customer Service? I thought this was a poll for skydivers?"

"This survey has too many questions."

-Reader's Choice-

[Blank] would be so great, if it wasn't for [blank].

"Skydiving would be so great, if it wasn't for my fucking day job."

"Tunnel competitions" would be so great, if it wasn't for "tunnel rats competing. How can a normal fun flyer compete with someone who gets unlimited time??"

"Freeflying" would be so great, if it wasn't for "old belly fliers taking forever in the door, hosing all the freefliers on their spot :)"

"Bay Area Skydiving in Byron, California would be so great if the winds weren't so high."

"Pacific Skydive and Skydiving Hawaii" would be so great, if it wasn't for "their childish pissing contests!"

"Sebastian would be so great, if it wasn't for the weather every fucking New Year's!"

"Skydive Chicago would be so great, if it wasn't for the stinky water."

"Skydive Jersey" would be so great, if it wasn't for its "proximity to the NYC airports."

"Australia" would be so great, if it wasn't for "the deadliest creatures on Earth."

"The Yin always needs some Yang."

"Hot dogs" would be so great, if it wasn't for "people complaining about the other people that put ketchup on them. Some people just like fucking ketchup OK!"

"Life" would be so great, if it wasn't for "assholes."

"Tokyo" would be so great, if it wasn't for "Godzilla."

"Sex" would be so great, if it wasn't for "babies."

"I have no idea what this question is even asking."



Worst

"Broad answer, but the worst at any given DZ (about half) is when the DZO is the S&TA. Drives me insane as an instructor. Severe problem that the USPA should not allow."

"Worst Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR): The Pope showing up to Philly and shutting down drop zones as the season is winding down ... and I was seriously starting to like him, too."

Best Rigger: Angela Muhs

"She takes the time to explain gear to jumpers and never makes you feel stupid for not understanding something or already knowing about something."

"She takes such good care of my gear. She even cleans up the shame I leave behind when I plow in on a landing. She's really great."

Best Everything: Brad Cole

"Brad Cole is the best! Amazing AFF-I, tandem master, canopy pilot, tunnel coach, vendor rep ... That guy does it all."

"Brad Cole is the best of everything."

Best Bartender: Lisa Kaminski

"Lisa Kaminski is THE BEST at the Tiki Bar at Skydive Chicago."

Best DZ for CRW: Skydive Elsinore

"As a CRW DAWG myself I can personally attest to the friendly and safety oriented staff. Most importantly they really know how to manage the air space and juggle the chaos you find on every drop zone so that safe canopy relative work can be practiced year round. THANKS!!!"

Best DZO: Claudia Blank, Michael Choi and Lelo Mras at Skydive Taft

"Lelo, Claudia and Michael [did] an outstanding job of getting an old shitty DZ no one wanted to be seen at into one of the best around. Bravo, guys!"

Best Gear Store: Ranch Pro Shop

"Sonic and Donna at Ranch Pro Shop: best customer service and support for gear."

"Ranch Pro Shop for customer service and many laughs."

Hottest Staff: Skydive Elsinore

Best Value: "All You Can Jump for \$100" at Tsunami Skydivers of Oceanside

Best of Everything Else

"Best fire performance: Devin Lloyd and Zej M'ski spinning fire at Delmarva. They even started (safely, with unlit chains) teaching people when they were done."

"Best package for 2016: Skydive Chicago monthly pass!"

"Best plane chant: Skydive the Ranch"

"Best small party scene: Skydive Kansas City. Where else is the DZO manning a DJ booth with fog machines and laser lights on a normal weekend?"

"Irish John Blackburn is the all-around best flyer, load organizer, tunnel ninja, teammate, and all around good humble human being!!! Every DZ should have an Irish John!"

"Raeford Parachute Center consumed 1,500+ bottles of Fire Ball last year."

"The [Performance Designs] Valkyrie changed my life in 2015."

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