Didsbury pub manager takes to the skies to raise thousands for children's charity

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Martin Devlin, manager of the Fletcher Moss in Didsbury, South Manchester has confronted his fear of heights by freefalling 15,000 feet in a skydive to raise £4,568 for Francis House Children's Hospice.

Middlesbrough born Martin has called Didsbury his home for more than three decades and has managed the Hydes Brewery-owned pub for the past 14 years.

Community support and fundraising come hand in hand at the south Manchester pub that hosts weekly quiz nights, acoustic nights and a Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve party nights with ticket sales in aid of the hospice that provides respite care and support to the families of children with life-shortening or life-threatening conditions.

Martin's support of Francis House has taken him from the comfort of the bar to abseiling down the Trafford Palazzo Tower and jumping out of a plane.

"I was on holiday lying on a beach and thinking I need to do something this year for Francis House. I looked to the sky and I thought skydive," says Martin.

"I'm scared of heights and abseiling down the tower at the Trafford Centre a few years ago was probably the scariest thing I have done. It just seems so unnatural to stand on the edge of a building and when they say, 'lean back', you just think that's not right!"

Despite his initial fears, Martin described his dive from the skies above Lancaster as a 'relaxing and enjoyable' experience.

"The adrenaline took over from the nerves and the weather was lovely," says Martin. "There were other people around doing it and you're watching them go up and come down all the time, and you can see how much they enjoyed it.

"I was most scared about the freefall, but that's the bit I enjoyed the most. When the shoot opened and we spun round I did feel a bit sick, but the instructor said to look at the horizon, and you can see Blackpool Tower and the Lake District.

"The nerves kicked in when I could see the ground and I knew I was going to land on it, but apart from that I loved it. If someone said do it for charity I would do it again."

Over the years Martin, his customers, friends and family have raised approximately £30,000 for the hospice, including selling knitted chicks on the bar for the charity's Easter appeal.

"Everyone's support has been wonderful because Francis House is a local charity and everybody loves that. I think that's why the skydive has been so positive because people know the hospice. People have spoken to me about Francis House and how great it is for the area and for the people and kids that go there."

Martin has seen for himself the work of the hospice after attending a public open day, taking a tour of the impressive facilities and experiencing the home from home environment.

"You can see why the money is required, it's such a lovely place. I've got a family friend whose daughter goes there for respite and she loves it. It brings a glow to her, and she's got a little community of friends she knows there.

"It's important that we all support places like Francis House. There isn't the funding from government, so they need the support of the community and people are prepared to support local charities.

"We held a raffle after the skydive and I told everyone it costs £5.8 million a year to run the hospice. On the day of my skydive the total raised was almost £4,000 and that sounds like a phenomenal amount but it's just six hours of the 365 days of funding it needs."

The Fletcher Moss was recently named among England's '500 Best Pubs' by The Telegraph. An

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honour that Martin puts down to the hard work of the team as well as it's timeless charm as a proper British pub and beautifully kept cask ales.

Customers, family and friends rallied in support of Martin and his skydive. The raffle raised more than £700 with prizes kindly donated by local businesses including Gail's Bakery, Little Pigs Butchers, The Cheese Hamlet and Rudy's Pizza. One customer donated a Manchester United kit, and Hydes Brewery and other suppliers also donated prizes.

"We're a Manchester brewer and we've only got 40 pubs so we're predominantly in the heart of the community and people like to support a local charity. We're lucky in that we live in quite an affluent area, on the sky dive a few customers sponsored me £100, £60 or £50 each which was really nice."

Martin is already thinking about his next fundraising challenge.

"I was talking to a customer and said I was contemplating doing a wing walk. That's a big step up and I'd have to lose some weight for that. I'm never going to be a marathon runner, but it's about trying to push yourself all of the time."

To find out more about skydiving for Francis House and to take part go to
https://www.francishouse.org.uk/get-involved/events/skydive/

Company Contact: