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# Rochester skydiving teacher's death ruled a suicide

■ **Tandem jump:** Student was not harmed as his instructor plunged a mile to the ground.

By **KIMBERLEY HAAS**  
Union Leader Correspondent

**ROCHESTER** — The death of a skydiving instructor from Rochester who became separated from his student during a tandem jump in Maine has been ruled a suicide.

Brett Bickford, 41, worked for Skydive New England.

On Sept. 27, he and a student jumped from a plane about 2 p.m. in Lebanon, Maine.

The student called police after he landed safely and could not find Bickford.

A search team located Bickford's body the next day about 750 feet from the Lebanon Airport runway.

An investigation into his death has been underway ever since.

On Monday, Maine State Police officials issued a statement about their determination that Bickford purposely loosened his harness about a mile above the ground.

"State police interviews with other skydivers and industry officials concluded that no experienced skydiver would loosen a parachute

harness by mistake," Public Information Officer Stephen McCausland said in the statement. "Investigators concluded that Bickford loosened his harness in midair and it was an intentional act."

According to his obituary, Bickford lived in Rochester his entire life and had worked for Skydive New England for 10 years.

"Those who knew Brett know he had a free spirit of life to live one day at a time.

Brett's smile and laughter live on in all who knew him," his obituary says.

Bickford was proud to have his private pilot's license and drone license. He was a member of the U.S. Parachute Association and Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, the obituary says.

Skydive New England has been in business for 34 years. Each of its professional instructors has completed an intense training

program, according to the company's website.

The Federal Aviation Administration requires that every potential instructor have at least three years of experience skydiving, 500 skydives and a master parachute license issued by an FAA-recognized organization before they can become certified.

The FAA was one of the participating agencies investigating Bickford's death.

## Parking garage goes up



JOSH GIBNEY/UNION LEADER

Construction is ahead of schedule for a six-story parking garage that can handle 1,700 vehicles at the southern end of the Millyard, just north of Northeast Delta Dental Stadium in Manchester. Project developer Peter Flotz said Monday that the project should be completed in mid-July, ahead of schedule. Southern New Hampshire University is leasing the entire garage, seen here in a photograph taken earlier this month.

## Sellers insist art isn't fake

■ **16 paintings:** Collector is suing for \$460,000 and says New Hampshire woman and her son committed fraud.

By **MARK HAYWARD**  
New Hampshire Union Leader

**CONCORD** — The mother and son accused of selling bogus paintings of modern artist Leon Golub still believe the 16 works sold to an international art collector are not forgeries, their lawyer said at the opening day of a trial that should last most of this week.

Loretann Gascard, 69, the one-time director of the Franklin Pierce University art gallery, had a decades-long friendship with Golub, who gave her some of his works, her lawyer, William Pribis, told a jury in U.S. District Court. Her son, Nikolas Gascard, acquired other Golubs when his aunt, a Golub collector, committed suicide and bequeathed her estate to Nikolas, Pribis said Monday.

They still believe those works are not forgeries, Pribis said.