

# Pensioner loves taking the plunge for hospital

JOHN Wilkins may be 77 but he is preparing to embark on his 24th fundraising parachute jump.

The Clevedon pensioner has been leaping out of planes in support of the Wallace and Gromit Appeal for Bristol Children's Hospital since 1998 and his next jump should take his fundraising total up to £100,000.

But the daredevil does not plan on hanging up his jumpsuit after his latest challenge and will continue to raise money for the hospital.

Mr Wilkins recruits fellow jumpers and sponsors to help him in his fundraising challenges and will be joined in his jump by about 16 other thrill-seekers on Saturday, June 14.

As well as parachute jumps, Mr Wilkins has carried out a host of daring stunts for the charity, including skydiving, bungee-jumping, abseiling, white-water rafting and a zip slide down the Avon Gorge with his 12-year-old grandson, Elliott, which have already raised £95,000.

When his feet are on the ground, Mr Wilkins spends several mornings at the children's hospital recruiting more jumpers and shaking a collection tin for the charity.

Mr Wilkins has been raising money since the 1980s, when he took part in marathons for cancer charities.

But having got a taste for skydiving when he was a paratrooper, he felt it was a good way to raise money and, with the appeal for the new hospital under way, he felt he could be an ideal benefactor.

He said: "When I was in Germany with the forces, my son Lee had an accident. He was in intensive care for 10 days and had a broken leg,



**Flying high:** John Wilkins outside the children's hospital

injured hands and a nasty knock to the head.

"He was about eight and made a full recovery and they were all such a help at the hospital.

"That is one of the reasons I help the Grand Appeal, plus I have two grandsons and want to do it to help children.

"When I set out to raise

money for the Grand Appeal, I had no idea of the amazing journey I was about to embark upon.

"I really do feel like a valued member of the team and have been overwhelmed by the generosity of people — without their support, reaching my six-figure sum would still be a dream."

Mr Wilkins' next target is the Volo dell'Angelo in Italy, a cable between two mountain peaks which participants go down as if flying like a bird.

Fundraising manager for the Grand Appeal, Laura Densem, said: "John is a complete star and a true ambassador for 'grey power'.

"His tireless fundraising is

an inspiration to us all and we'd love to hear from any other volunteers who would like to follow in John's footsteps and help raise money for the children's hospital."

To find out more, call 927 3888, email [info@grandappeal.org.uk](mailto:info@grandappeal.org.uk) or visit [www.grandappeal.org](http://www.grandappeal.org).