

## Dufferin OPP's 2026 Polar Plunge to bring Canadian spirit to local ice rink



Written By Sam Odrowski

"Don't think, just jump."

Those are the instructions that long-time polar plunger and Special Olympics athlete Ryan MacBean shares when asked for advice on participating in the Dufferin Ontario Provincial Police's 2026 Polar Plunge for the very first time.

The annual plunge, which fundraises for Special Olympics Ontario, will be held from 4 to 6 p.m. on March 29 at the Centre Dufferin Recreation Centre ice rink.

"We are the only plunge in Canada, if not the world, that's actually doing it indoors, in a hockey arena," said Jeff McLean, a Dufferin OPP officer who's been organizing the plunge since its inception in 2017.

There's a Canadian theme for this year's event, since it's happening on an ice rink. Participants are encouraged to dress Canadian, with a costume contest for the best-dressed individual, group and Special Olympian. There's also a wrestling belt, awarded to the plunge's highest fundraiser.

MacBean, an Orangeville resident who's been doing law-enforcement-led polar plunges throughout the region since 2016, will be leading the charge at the local polar plunge on Sunday, March 29. He's looking to raise \$1,500 or more to compete at the Special Olympics National Games in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

He qualified to compete in the national games earlier this year in the 50-metre and 100-metre breaststroke categories.

To boost his fundraising efforts, he's teamed up with Insp. Michael Di Pasquale, Dufferin OPP Detachment Commander, who is participating in the polar plunge for his first time this year.

"I'm looking forward to the opportunity to jump alongside with Ryan and raising money for a very worthy cause in our community," said Insp. Di Pasquale.

McLean has been a central figure in organizing the Dufferin Polar Plunge since its original launch in 2017, under the Shelburne Police Service (SPS). He was also involved with the SPS's Law Enforcement Torch Run, held prior to his first plunge.

It was actually MacBean who inspired him to first take the plunge all those years ago.

“When I originally started doing Torch Run initiatives, I had no connection to Special Olympics. It was at the first Torch Run that I met Ryan and [his dad] Kevin,” said McLean. “Just seeing Ryan out at the events and seeing him compete inspired me to want to give back and long-term friendships have grown out of it.”

Describing his first polar plunge, McLean said, “It’s definitely shocking when you hit the water,” but it’s all about having the right mental state and attitude.

“It’s mind over matter, where as long as you’re in the right mindset, then the human body can do anything,” he added.

Over the past few years, the OPP’s polar plunges have averaged 75 plungers and 300-400 spectators.

McLean said the numbers are inspiring and show what a small community can accomplish when it comes together to support a good cause.

He said he would encourage everyone in the community to support the event and donate, ensuring Special Olympic athletes like MacBean can succeed.

Funds raised help cover the costs of training athletes, travelling to competitions, and purchasing uniforms.

The Dufferin County community has stepped up to support the Special Olympics through the Dufferin OPP’s Polar Plunge for the past several years. Since 2017, the community has raised over \$300,000.

Special Olympics is the charity of choice for the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police. The Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics is a key global fundraiser that has ensured the longevity and success of the Special Olympics over the years. Over \$1 billion has been raised worldwide since the run launched in 1981.

Special Olympics Ontario leadership has often stated that without the Law Enforcement Torch Run, the games would not be able to operate in certain regions or at their current level.

There are over 50 registered Special Olympics athletes in Dufferin County and more than 23,000 across Ontario.

MacBean is among those 50 registered athletes, spending three days a week in the gym and three days in the pool to train for the Special Olympics. MacBean said he enjoys being competitive and likes to win, which is why he trains so hard throughout the week.

His dad, Kevin MacBean, said he’s incredibly proud of his son and grateful for the support he receives through the Special Olympics.

“We’re just thankful to the law enforcement and OPP that put on this event to help Ryan achieve his goals and enrich his life,” Kevin said.