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?Freezing for a reason? Polar Plunge returns virtually

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It's once again the time of year for Shelburne residents to take the plunge and take part in ?freezing for a reason? with the annual Shelburne Polar Plunge hosted by Shelburne Police.

The annual plunge, which raises donations to support Canadian Special Olympics athletes, will look a little different this year, with participants joining virtually.

Shelburne Police Const. Jeff McLean, the primary organizer of the plunge, spoke with the Free Press about hosting the virtual event.

?Obviously we weren't able to gather a large group to do it this year, how we have in past years, which is unfortunate. By being able to do it virtually, it allowed not only Police Services who are involved with it, but volunteers and plungers to be able to do it safely while still raising much needed funds for these Special Olympics programs.?

Shelburne Police Service (SPS) has been hosting the local Polar Plunge event since 2018 and restarted the Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics in 2011. Through the two events, nearly $220,000 has been raised for Special Olympics with a little over $100,000 of that through the Polar Plunge.

Each year a community goal for the amount of donations raised is set, but with COVID-19 a province wide goal of $100,000 was set instead. McLean said the provinces donation goal was bypassed in the first two weeks of the event with $131,000 raised at the time of print.

Despite having to cancel large plans for this year's plunge, McLean said that there has been a lot of support from the community for the virtual event.

?It's been a very hard time with the lockdown from the COVID-19 pandemic and I've found that anybody that we've spoken to, that has heard about the virtual event, they've been very supportive,? said McLean. ?It also gives them a bit of a fun way to participate on their own terms, where they're not jumping in front of 400 people and add to the creativity.?

Recommendations on ways to participate include taking a cold showers or filling your bathtub with ice cubes, jumping into your pool, running through a sprinkler, or getting sprayed with a hose outside.

While SPS will officially disband on Feb. 18,transitioning to OPP, McLean said he is working with the OPP to continue the event in the years to come.

?I've started speaking to the management of the Dufferin OPP Detachment about the possibility of carrying it on and increasing the fundraising efforts, and the event size. Moving forward there's a few checks and balances that need to be done on the logistics side, but I'm looking forward to carrying it on,? he noted.

The local Polar Plunge event started on Feb.1 and will run until Feb. 28. To take part in the fundraising effort, register at www.polarplunge.ca. Incentives for fundraising include Yeti mugs and the chance to win an Xbox One and a Hush Blanket.

?I want to thank the community for the support that they've shown us over the past nine years that we've been holding events for the Special Olympics. The support from the businesses and from the community has been amazing,? said McLean. ?We couldn't hold an

event like this without the community support as well as the fundraising efforts to bring not only attention to the Special Olympics cause, but to assist in raising money to support these athletes.?