

Special Olympics polar plunge kicks off



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Local law enforcement and leaders experienced a chilly splash this long weekend as they took part in the annual Polar Plunge in support of Special Olympic athletes.

The local Polar Plunge was held on Friday (Feb. 18) at the Dufferin OPP Detachment in Orangeville and saw a small group of seven participants 'freezing for a reason' as Dufferin-Caledon Special Olympic athletes doused them with buckets of water.

'It feels great to be able to have both the athletes as well as some of the important role models within our community here,' said Dufferin OPP Const. Jeff McLean, one of the organizers of the plunge. 'It's a good first step towards hopefully what we can do bigger and better next year.'

The first local polar plunge was held in 2018 and quickly became an annual tradition hosted by the Shelburne Police Service (SPS) alongside the Law Enforcement Torch Run (LETR) for Special Olympics, which was restarted in 2011. After the disbanding of the Shelburne Police Service in 2021, McLean, as the primary organizer of the event, told the Free Press he was in the works of continuing the event with Dufferin OPP.

With McLean and Sarah Dereski, a provincial zone coordinator for the LETR, the 2022 Polar Plunge returned for a fifth year.

'It's definitely a good feeling. The number of contacts that I've made not only within Shelburne, but also Dufferin County and now we get to expand on it, on the sponsors and on the fundraising; it's good to be able to continue that,' said McLean. 'Now that we're bigger than a small town and cover a whole county we can make it bigger and better.'

'It's one of my favourite events of the year with law enforcement. You're cold for a couple minutes, but it is worth every second to see the smiles on the athletes faces and the money that we are able to raise through this,' said Dereski.

'Just to be able to support them in the community and in their sports means so much.'

A provincial wide donation goal of \$350,000 has been set in honour of the 35th anniversary of the Polar Plunge, with over \$35,000 raised at the time of print.

Special Olympics Dufferin coaches and athletes were on hand for the plunge on Friday, with the role of 'plunging' the participants with water.

Kurt Carlson, volunteer coordinator for the local chapter said the Polar Plunge is their main fundraising event of the year.

'As a Special Olympics chapter, if we participate in it, we get a portion of the proceeds and for the last three years we've been one of the top 10 teams in Ontario for fundraising,' said Carlson. 'It's a great family to belong with.'

Ryan Macbean, a medalist in swimming, was one of the local athletes lending a hand at the plunge and said the support from the community means a lot to the athletes.

Jason Scordia, a medalist in soccer and golf from Caledon added, 'I always go to the events, they're a number one support for Special Olympics and I always help back.'

The Polar Plunge for Special Olympics is running from Feb. 14 until March 21. Community members can take part in the event by registering online at polarplunge.ca, posting a fun video using #PlungeON, and fundraising with friends and family. All proceed raised go directly to Special Olympics Ontario.