

Polar Plunge raises \$10,000 for Special Olympics

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Kirk Smith/THE REVIEW

Students jump into a pool of cold water to raise money for the Special Olympics.

BY SEASON COOPER STAFF REPORTER

More than 250 students took the plunge in ice-cold water Sunday for the university's inaugural Polar Plunge. The event, planned by the athletics department, the Polar Bear Plunge committee and Special Olympics Delaware (SODE) raised over \$10,000 for the 3,700 Special Olympics athletes across the state.

Participants included university students, athletes, local high school students and faculty. Taking place on the Harrington Turf, students gathered in line or danced by the D.J. booth awaiting their turn to take an arctic splash.

While this is a first-time event at the university, the plunge has been a popular fundraiser for SODE since 1992.

"The Lewes Polar Plunge is Delaware's largest Special Olympics fundraiser," Kylie Frazer, the SODE director of youth and school initiatives, said. "It always takes place the first Sunday in February when students either aren't here because of winter session or they are moving back in, so UD students have never been able to participate in our plunge."

In order to get students involved, the athletics department and SODE teamed up to assemble a team of students to help plan the fundraiser.

"We have RAs, students from the Special Olympics College, which is here on campus, we have students that are just interested in helping and some from athletics," Frazer said.

Sophomore Ryan Taylor recalls how he got the opportunity to plan the event.

"I knew Kylie through working with Special Olympics in high school, so when she called and asked me if I wanted to do this I said yes," Taylor said. "My sister has Down syndrome, so Special Olympics has always been a part of my life."

Taylor, a resident assistant (RA), worked on the committee as a residence life representative working to promote the event across residence halls on campus.

"I'm here today to dive with some of my fellow RAs, and looking at the turnout, I hope this can be an annual thing," Taylor said.

Fellow committee member and part of the university's Student Athletic Advisory Council Elyse Andrews, dressed in a penguin costume, expressed her eagerness to take the plunge.

"I'm from Delaware, so I know about the one in Rehoboth and I've never been able to drive down there, so bringing it to Delaware is awesome," Andrews said.

Throughout the day, students and YouDee jumped into the 4-foot deep pool that held approximately 6,000 gallons of water. John Swift, owner of Swift Pools in Newark, donated the pool for the event. The water temperature was kept in the low 40s by continuously filling the pool with ice.

Despite the cold temperatures, freshman Amanda Flores expressed no regret.

"I live in Redding, so it was nice that a lot of kids on my floor came out and jumped in together," she said.

Jeunet Fidelino, a junior and Alpha Phi Omega member, said her hope is he hopes the event will become a university tradition.

"Before today, we had over 100 pre-registered," Fidelino said. "I think it's a good addition to the UD campus and the activities that we have and also it brings a lot of awareness to Special Olympics, which is a very big part of Delaware in general."

Special Olympics is a big part of life for Sasha Hudson, who has been a Special Olympic athlete for over nine years. Hudson is an athlete for track, bowling and basketball.

"I have been to the Polar Plunge in Lewes three times, and I just love the excitement," Hudson said.

Committee executive chair Meghan Paulsen said she had an "amazing" day.

"My smile grew so big when I found out we had reached our goal of \$10,000," Paulsen stated in an email. "Beautiful weather, great music and an amazing group of dedicated, passionate people!"

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