

PENGUIN PLUNGE



Top: Team Monarch School of Derry poses for a photo before the first wave of plungers at the 2016 Special Olympics Penguin Plunge fundraiser Sunday. **Above:** Members of Frozen Sections Penguin Plungers of Keene Parks & Recreation exit the cold waters of the Atlantic Ocean at the Special Olympics Penguin Plunge fundraiser Sunday. **MATT PARKER PHOTOS**

478 charge into the Atlantic in a benefit for Special Olympics New Hampshire

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HAMPTON – Some said the sunny skies and 43-degree weather made for a Penguin Plunge less frigid than usual at Hampton Beach on Sunday.

Hailey Rand, 16, of Concord, called the jump into the ocean “refreshing” and “not that bad.”

Others said a warm day in February can still be quite chilly.

“It was very cold,” said Miss Hampton Beach Victoria Soucy, who took part in her first Penguin Plunge on Sunday. “I should have worn shoes.”

SEE PLUNGERS, A2

A total 478 people charged into the icy Atlantic Ocean for the 17th annual Penguin Plunge, raising \$387,624.75 for Special Olympics New Hampshire.

The Penguin Plunge and its high school affiliate, Saturday’s High School Plunge, combined to bring in just over \$550,000 this weekend. That was on par with 2015’s total, a banner year, said Chelsea Gill, director of development at Special Olympics New Hampshire. Ocean Boulevard was closed off for the event, which included a costume contest judged by guests including Soucy, U.S. Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., and Miss New Hampshire Holly Blanchard.

“Today was wonderful,” Gill said. “We couldn’t have asked for better weather today ... I was



so thankful people wanted to continue to come out here, year after year, and support our athletes and support our cause.”

Ayotte jumped in with the first wave of plungers and her team. She said she’s been passionate about the Special Olympics since she was state attorney general. Sunday was her third plunge.

“It was awesome,” Ayotte said after getting out of the water. “There was just such energy in the crowd of plungers, and everyone is so excited about going in, and it’s such a great cause.”

Soucy agreed Sunday’s crowd had great energy. She made a spur of the moment decision to jump in the water that morning and didn’t regret it.

“There’s so much love in the atmosphere,” Soucy said. “I think I’m definitely going to come back and do it next year.”

Many of the participants Sunday were there to support family and friends who participate in the Special Olympics.

Rand was there with her family to support her brother Max, a Special Olympics athlete who plays soccer, floor hockey, basketball and bowling.

Whitney Freeman, 26, of New Boston, participated in her second Penguin Plunge Sunday. She said she got involved because she’s a special education teacher in Nashua.

Freeman said the dive and the subsequent rush up the beach makes for a wild rush.

“It’s adrenaline causing,” Freeman said. “I’ve gone skydiving and I would seriously equate it to the same amount of adrenaline to me.”

Many participants have been doing the Penguin Plunge since it began.

Former Hampton police chief Jamie Sullivan has gone in the water all 17 years.

“The Penguin Plunge is won-

derful,” Sullivan said. “It’s cold, but it’s great when you see what you raise money for.”

Bill Jones, of Bedford, also known as “Captain Plunger” for his red helmet with three plungers attached, has gone every year and has been involved with the Special Olympics for the past 25 years. He has twin daughters who are intellectually disabled and now participate in the games. He said the organization elevates the lives of its athletes in a special way.

“It improves their world,” Jones said. “It’s a fun event, it’s great to be here ... then you stand back and realize we do this for the athletes so these athletes can show people what they’re capable of doing.”



The second wave of plungers runs to the cold waters of the Atlantic Ocean at the N.H. Special Olympics Penguin Plunge fundraiser Sunday.