

LOCAL & STATE

Annual leap into river draws record number of plungers, pledges

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The annual costumed legion of Polar Plungers took their frigid dip Saturday in the Big Sioux River on behalf of the South Dakota Special Olympics.

The Dukes of Hazzard were represented, the Blue Man Group, a Canadian Mountie, the Axtell Park Middle School lion mascot. And 60 plungers from Washington High School were numerous enough in their togas to call to mind the Roman Senate.

Sioux Falls Mayor Dave Munson, one of the judges, still was gimping around on a recently rebuilt ankle, but his sense of political propriety was in campaign form. He observed evenhandedly, "We had a greater number of jumpers this year. In other years I think the costumes might have been more unique.

"But it's good to see the number of young people involved."

He was right about the jumpers, though. A record 171 took the long walk off a short pier behind the Country Inn and Suites and Fall's Landing, and raised a record \$28,318.11 with pledges secured from friends, family and co-workers.

"It's a huge fundraiser," Special Olympics CEO and development director Carol Husby said.

In addition to helping underwrite athletic programs for an estimated 1,600 South Dakota Special Olympians, "This year we've got some special needs. We've got four athletes going to the World



Jason Lillestol, aka Daisy Duke (left), and Linda Hamberger, aka Boss Hogg, await their jumps into the Big Sioux River.

Games in China," Husby said.

One of those athletes, Matt Jacobson, who recently graduated from Lincoln High School, will be competing in the 50-meter freestyle, 50-meter backstroke and 4-by-50 relay swimming events. A quick hop in the river was in keeping with the aquatic theme, and Jacobson elevated the level of Polar Plunge drollery when he added a bucketful of ice and ice water to the chocolate-colored river before following it in.

"Wasn't cold," he said.

Tell that to Anne Peters.

The member of the Brandon Valley Blue Men emitted a pitiful shriek a moment before entering the water, and her trepidation was confirmed. She emerged streaming Big Sioux and blue face paint.

"It was for a good cause, but it was colder than what I thought it would be," she said shivering.

The sentiment was confirmed by Frank Doerksen, the Axtell Park teacher wearing the lion costume. He plans to have the costume dry cleaned before returning it.

"This thing is a lot heavier than I thought," he said.

Jason Lillestol and Linda Hamberger observed their fourth Polar Plunge as representatives of "The Dukes of Hazzard." He apparently drew the short straw and in minuscule denim shorts, tight flannel shirt and a wig hit the Big Sioux as Daisy Duke. In a dazzling white suit straining at the seams with padding and gesturing with an enormous stogie, she went in as Boss Hogg.

"I've got foam in this thing," she said upon emerging from the river in rotund splendor. "I was gonna float if I had to."

In the first Polar Plunge in 1999, a dozen jumpers raised \$4,600. The fundraiser originated with Sioux Falls Police Capt. David Kull, who also jumped Saturday.

"Who would have thought when Dave came to me with the idea the first year that we'd ever do a second one?" Husby said.

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"Disco Man" Ron Schouber takes a leap Saturday into the Big Sioux River near Country Inn and Suites and Fall's Landing. He was among a record 171 jumpers in the annual Polar Plunge to raise money for Special Olympics of South Dakota. The first plunge was in 1999. Temperatures reached a high of 57 degrees. But a cold start to April hasn't allowed the water to warm up much. A record \$28,318.11 was raised.

PHOTOS BY
EMILY SPARTZ
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