

Special Olympians, Emergency Responders take the plunge to support programs



York Regional Police, along with the Law Enforcement Torch Run Ontario, celebrated the annual polar plunge in support of Special Olympics Ontario last Thursday.

Fundraising teams, including local sports athletes, officers and members of the Emergency Response Unit, jumped into a small pool of ice water right in front of the new York Regional Police Association building in Aurora to commemorate all of their efforts this year.

As one of the few polar plunges in the province to host this event in-person, Special Event Coordinator with York Regional Police Karen Richards said it was essential to be face-to-face.

"It was really important for us to host this event in-person because we wanted the opportunity to see the athletes again. We know over the last two years the athletes have been missing out on competition. COVID has been really hard on them. We wanted to make sure we can come to this amazing building and it's way easier to fundraise money when you're in person," Richards said.

"The majority of the province had stuck to the virtual platform this year and as of now, we're up over \$300,000 that's been raised across the Province. And York on their own are up to \$25,000," added Manager of the Law Enforcement Torch Run Derek Spence.

In 2000 and 2013, York Regional Police hosted the Special Olympics Ontario Games. As a long-time supporter, it was truly all about seeing the athletes and local programs, get back on their feet.

"For some of our athletes that are participating tonight, a portion of the funds raised will be supporting local programs. There are a whole bunch of Aurora Special Olympics athletes plunging tonight, so that money will stay in Aurora and [be used] to get back on to the playing field again," Richards said.

Noted Spence: "These funds will be used for registrations, equipment, field rentals, uniforms, things like that, and allow the athletes to get back out and compete once again," Spence added.

The Aurora Minor Tigers and the Newmarket Renegades attended. Specifically, for the plunge, anyone was able to participate if they chose to do so. In total, 70 participants took the leap into the ice-cold water.

At the end of the night, prizes were given to teams with the best costume and best plunge.

"All the funds raised will support over 26,000 athletes in the province of Ontario," Spence said.

The next event coming up will be the race for Plunkett coming up on May 25.

The event is in memory of fallen officer Rob Plunkett. It will consist of a five-kilometre and ten-kilometre run at Riverwalk Commons in Newmarket. Richards said that event is expected to bring in another \$25,000 as well.

By Robert Belardi