

Swimmers to make historic cross of Lake Ontario for Special Olympics



By Jake Courtepatte

A small group of swimmers and non-swimmers alike will undertake a herculean challenge in the chilly waters of Lake Ontario this August.

Dubbed '50 for 150', nine people are ready to swim in a relay-style effort all the way from Niagara-on-the-Lake to Marilyn Bell Park in Toronto.

Spearheaded by Brendan Black, who has worked with the Special Olympics golf program, and his stepmother Nancy, who founded the Aurora Master Ducks Swim Club and the local Special Olympics swim club, the group has a goal of raising \$50,000 in support of Special Olympics Ontario.

The name '50 for 150' comes from the 50-kilometre distance of the swim, as well as holding the event in the year of Canada's significant anniversary.

'Brendan and I were just talking about the significance of Canada's 150th and how it was kind of cool that we are alive at this important benchmark in our country's story,' said Black. 'He then said how amazing it would be to do something big for us to connect to this historic date - as a legacy - but mostly just to give back to the community.'

As for the logistics of such an undertaking, each swimmer will be responsible for between three and seven kilometres of the 50.6-kilometre stretch, planning to swim in 50-minute increments one at a time. One of the most harrowing aspects is the prospect of swimming at night, something Black called 'an incredible and frightening experience.'

While the team will have a fleet of supporting vessels, including sailboats, zodiacs, and motorboats, the water temperature is expected to be between 15-22 degrees Celsius.

While some of the nine are trained swimmers, others are athletes from different sport backgrounds, making training a challenge in such little time.

Aiming for ten kilometres per week at the local pools, mostly at the Stronach Aurora Rec Complex, the team has recently taken to lake swimming as well twice a week with the warmer weather.

Other, more peculiar actions also have to be taken to prepare for such an undertaking.

'The other specialized training they are doing is 'believe it or not' taking cold showers,' said Black. 'They have to acclimatize to the cold water conditions of Lake Ontario and other than actually swimming in cold water, that's one of the best ways to get used to the cold!'

Most of the money raised will be used to support the 2019 Special Olympics Ontario International Summer Games, where around 2,000 athletes and coaches converge on Toronto, though some of the proceeds will be diverted to support local athletes in the Aurora community.

Glenn MacDonell, CEO of Special Olympics Canada, said the organization is 'very pleased' to be the beneficiary of such an event. 'As Canada continues to celebrate 150 years of confederation, this is our way of joining in the 150 celebrations,' said MacDonell.

?This passionate group will showcase their heart, talent, fitness and endurance just like Special Olympics athletes do each and every day. We wish all the swimmers the best of luck and a safe swim across Lake Ontario. Thanks again for raising much needed funds and awareness for our cause.?

?The 2019 International Youth Games is a big deal,? said Black. ?And it needs this level of funding.?

The group is currently almost halfway to their lofty goal, having raised around \$22,000. Donations can be made on an individual level, or to the team in general, at www.50for150.com.