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### Swimmers brave frigid surf for 13th annual Polar Bear Plunge

Posted by the [Asbury Park Press](#) on 02/27/06

BY **MATT PORIO**  
TOMS RIVER BUREAU

POINT PLEASANT BEACH — With noon approaching on the Jenkinson's Boardwalk beach Sunday, the wind chill made the day's 31-degree temperature feel like 10 degrees to exposed human flesh.

And as participants — clad in bikinis and various styles of swim trunks, their skin covered in goose bumps and their teeth chattering — waited to charge the 39-degree water in the 13th annual Polar Bear Plunge, there was no shortage of flesh exposed to the frigid air.

"This is majorly cold," said Mary Santiago, wearing a bikini and participating for the second time. "My adrenaline is frozen. I can't even say it's pumping."

John Lear, of Nazareth, Pa., is a nine-year veteran of the event. But, "It's cold this year," he said, shivering in a towel as he waited for go-time. "It's for a good cause, though."

The event, which drew about 2,500 participants, raises money for Special Olympics



(STAFF PHOTO: MICHAEL SYPNIEWSKI)

Participants find their way in and out of the water Sunday at the 13th annual Polar Bear Plunge in Point Pleasant Beach. About 2,500 people took part in the event despite frigid conditions.

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Last year, it raised \$540,000, increasing the 12-year total to \$3.5 million.

This year, participants earned every cent they raised.

Santiago and her husband, Julio Santiago Jr., 41, of Julio's Barber Shop in New Egypt, received \$2,535 in pledges from friends, patrons and fellow business owners, they said.

In just his swim trunks, Julio readied for his first-ever plunge, shielded only by the red, white and blue paint covering his torso and the white paint covering his head — a walking, swimming barber pole.

"I'm gonna run so fast, I'm gonna walk on water," he said. "I can already feel myself numbing."

Which was probably a good thing. A few minutes later, with the rest of the mob on the beach, he raced through the cold, wet sand and into the frigid, breaking waves.

Within seconds, most of the participants kicked up sand in the opposite direction, desperately searching for towels. (Not Julio Santiago, however, who triumphantly splashed in the waves with a few other brave souls for several minutes after the initial plunge.)

Back on the beach, after the race, former NFL star Phil Villapiano, who played for the Oakland Raiders and was on the team that won Super Bowl XI in 1977, was glad to be out of the water.

"I'd rather play against the Chiefs again than get back in that water," said Villapiano, 57, a Rumson resident.

But Jason Donkersloot, 28, of Hawthorne seemed ready to get back in. He lasted several minutes in the water, he said.

"I'd rather be in the water," he said. "It's colder out here."

Point Pleasant First Aid Squad Dive Team Chief Diver Chet Nesley — who supervised the event with other divers from in the water — said the air temperature was chilly compared with other years, but he remembers worse.

There was the time a few years ago when it was sleeting with 50-mph winds, he said.



Right: Mel Meszaros of South Amboy waves the flag as he prepares for Sunday's Polar Bear Plunge. Below: Thomas Wisniewski displays his swimming costume for the occasion.

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And despite the frigid temperatures this year, the dive team reported no injuries or other problems.

"A good time was had by all," Nesley said. "It went really, really well."

*This article contains information from previous Asbury Park Press stories.*

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