

Ready to take the plunge

BY TAMMY BURKE
Staff writer

LEWISBURG — Looking to get your heart pumping in February? You may want to join a hearty bunch of thrill seekers and bucket-list fulfillers at the annual Polar Bear Plunge at 2 p.m. Saturday at the Ninth Annual Heart of Lewisburg Ice Festival.

The plunge will take place at the St. George Street landing. Registration opens at 1 p.m. Cost to register is \$20 and the first 300 signed up get a commemorative T-shirt.

According to Linda Sterling, executive director of Lewisburg Downtown Partnership (LDP), the event started about two years after the ice festival started and around the time the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership formed.



Photo provided by Edward Louie
One participant gasps as she hits the icy Susquehanna River during the Heart of Lewisburg's Ice Festival's Polar Bear Plunge.



Photo provided by Edward Louie
Participants of the Heart of Lewisburg Ice Festival's Polar Bear Plunge race into the Susquehanna River.

The Susquehanna Greenway, which is stationed in Lewisburg, works to connect people with natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources along a 500-mile corridor of the Susquehanna River.

“(LDP) thought it would be cool to feature something with the Susquehanna River, plus it was unique,” Sterling said. She said it took a while for the event to catch on. The first year brought 40 registered plungers, mostly Bucknell students, but since then, it’s grown to almost 300 people as of last year.

“It’s become a big tradition that people do every year,” Sterling said noting that some of the participants are out-of-the-area and travel to different

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Bear Plunge are slated to cover the cost of the ice for the ice sculptures, which is one of the key components to the festival. The ice is used for both the small ice sculptures which line Market Street and the large ice sculptures located in Hufnagle Park.

Sterling said that people can have a hands-on experience with the large sculptures such as children climbing through the ice cascade last year.

"(The Polar Bear Plunge) is a great part of the ice festival," Sterling said noting the great partnerships Lewisburg Downtown Partnership (LDP) has with other organizations, such as Bucknell University.

"We couldn't do all the events otherwise," Sterling said in reference to the many activities the festival offers and runs through the weekend.

Sterling mentioned other organizing partners such as the Donald Heiter Community Center and the Lewisburg Rotary clubs.

The Polar Bear Plunge is also a pageantry of sorts with colorful costumes and fun.

Sterling described that the Friends of Lewisburg have made it

a point for years doing what they call, "the running of the bison," where they decorate a Subaru with horns and ride down the street before doing the plunge.

"I really enjoy the costumes that people put together and the effort they make to jump in the water," Pierson said, noting that various civic groups also come out in costume for the event.

"It's really neat to see the community rally around the event," Pierson said.

According to Pierson, planning for the event begins before winter break with about 10-15 hours a week.

"The workload is incredible," she said noting that she and Jessica Pacquin, coordinator for the Bucknell University Office of Civic Engagement, oversee registration, advertise, order t-shirts and do the overall organizing of the event.

Pierson said that this year they are getting help with online registration from Fit for Funds and again from Bucknell students who will be helping the day of the event.

Pierson also said that Pacquin is the one with the bullhorn on Saturday and will be dividing people into groups of 25 to 30.

According to both Pierson and Sterling, breaking the participants into smaller groups keeps participants safer as they are jumping into a frigid river.

According to Sterling, the community emergency services come out every year to prepare the river for the event, including having a diver in an orange wet suit.

Sterling remembered one year

that the emergency services chipped three feet of ice away to get the river ready for the plunge.

Additionally, Sterling said she always arranges for an ambulance to be available but as of yet, it hasn't been needed.

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Kevin Mertz/Standard Journal

Frances Wawriw, right, of White Deer, was drawn as the winner of a \$150 gas card and deluxe car wash from Linntown Car Wash, Lewisburg, from **Standard Journal**. Here, Standard Journal's **Al Walter** presents Wawriw with the card. The prize was part of Standard Journal's Gas Card Giveaway Contest.