

Penguins

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take to the water.

And take to the water they did, with primitive screams and shouts of enthusiasm, what appeared to be a record turnout took the plunge with less-than-dignified splashing, shivering, and teeth-chattering moans.

"I don't know if we set a record, but it looks like we have more swimmers every year," said Mike McGovern, executive director of the Rhode Island Special Olympics and organizer of the event. "We're hoping to raise \$85,000 this year, and all indications say we'll reach that goal. I couldn't be more pleased," he continued.

McGovern, one of the founders of the annual event, has taken the plunge every year since its inception. "Thirteen of us 30 years ago did it on a lark, on a dare, and its grown into this, which of course we're very proud of," McGovern said, hair still dripping from just coming out of the water. "Every year it gets colder as I get older," he laughed.

Keith Godena, a veteran Jamestown firefighter and emergency medical technician of 22 years and his wife Anita, a firefighter and EMT for seven years, stood by with other rescue personnel in case of emergencies. "I've been coming for 21 years, and we've never had anything worse than a few scratches. It's a great event for a good cause," said Keith.

Rhode Island fire departments were well represented, with Hopkins Hill Fire Rescue bringing their giant, inflatable penguin wearing a banner announcing their participation. North Kingstown and Warwick emergency personnel also made their presence known.

Kay Coyne-McCoy sold Penguin Plunge T-shirts from the back of a pick-up truck. "I've also gone in the water every year for 27 years," said McCoy. "So far we've sold more than a thousand T-shirts for \$10 each, and we'll sell a lot more before it's over," she added.

Radio station B101 from Providence, sponsors for the event, brought their truck and



The morning after the Penguin Plunge. These shoes are missing their owners on Monday. Photo by Andrea vonHohenleiten

provided music and entertainment for the festivities. Amy Hagen, one of the station's popular radio personalities, shivered as she talked about making the plunge for 16 years. When asked how she felt after emerging from the water, her one-word comment was, "Frozen." Then she laughed

and ran off to find dry clothes.

Mike Flynn, 51, of West Warwick, a Penguin Plunger for 18 years said, "It's my cardiac stress test. If I survive this, then I'm okay."

Jack Daily, 46, said, "I've been doing this for 16 years. We're raising money for a good

cause. It's well worth the effort."

Participants wore everything from rubber penguin hats to bow ties with their swimsuits and sneakers. Some were lucky enough to have a friend with a dry towel waiting for them as they shivered and waddled to shore. Others just toughed it out

and walked back to their cars a block or more away to don dry clothing. All had a great time supporting one of the largest fund-raisers for the Rhode Island Special Olympics. The proceeds are used to train mentally challenged athletes to compete in a variety of sports.

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