

# Thrills and chills for annual Polar Plunge

**By: Allison Kowalski**

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Ready, set, jump. Students and committees at The College at Brockport are making preparations to dive into the freezing waters of Ontario Beach Park for a good cause. This is the ninth annual Polar Plunge in Rochester, but only the second year Brockport has been involved.

"Freezin' For a Reason" Special Olympics NY Polar Plunge is an extraordinary event that raises awareness and funds for hardworking and deserving athletes of Special Olympics New York. This fundraiser is held throughout the country, and thousands of individuals are more than ready to plunge to help others.

"The cause is worth it all," sophomore Paul Giglio said. Giglio is the student coordinator for Brockport's Polar Plunge this year.

According to the Special Olympics Web site, the organization provides athletes the opportunity to develop physical fitness, have fun and participate in athletic activities and competitions. These include snowshoeing, gymnastics, floor hockey, bowling and track and field. Athletes share their skills with families, and develop friendships along the way. This chance for participation builds confidence and character, which will transcend into daily life.

The Western New York Polar Plunge helps raise money to support year-round sports training and athletic competitions for children and adults living with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Donations also support transportation costs for athletes, allowing them to travel to competitions throughout the state. Supporting more than 46,000 athletes, New York state holds the leading Special Olympics program in the United States. There are also more than 1 million participants from 150 countries.

Special Olympics is a non-profit organization so all money spent for coaches, athletes, competitions and volunteers solely relies on donations of groups from Brockport - students, faculty, staff, fraternities, sororities, departments, athletic teams and individual teams - for the first annual Polar Plunge.

In February 2008, more than 2,000 people jumped into freezing waters, raising more than \$600,000 through seven separate plunges. The College at Brockport raised more than \$6,000 alone, with help from students, staff, faculty, organizations and the community. For the 2009 Polar Plunge, Brockport hopes to beat its \$6,000 record-high with \$8,000, Giglio said.

"We are the regional champions," Giglio said. "It's a great cause since it provides help and funds for the athletes."

Since Brockport raised the most money for Polar Plunge in the Rochester area, it received a free country concert sponsored by WBEE. Through the "Cool School" challenge, up-and-coming national country artist Lady Antebellum rocked the walls of the Union Ballroom for hundreds of students.

This year, WBEE will provide another free country concert to the school that raises the most money. Details about the person or act have not yet been announced.

Giglio said the students and community made the first Polar Plunge at Brockport extremely successful.

"The student body gave so much school spirit, and this is one of the reasons we did so well," Giglio said. "The people were great."

The College at Brockport has had a history with participating with the Special Olympics. Besides being actively involved in the Polar Plunge, the College hosted the Fifth International Summer Special Olympics in August 1979.

It is easy to become involved with the Polar Plunge. Visit [Polarplunge.net](http://Polarplunge.net), and click on "Register as a Plunger." From there, individuals can form a team, invite contacts, friends and create a personal Polar Plunge page. For more information, e-mail Melissa Wiggins at [mwiggins@nyso.org](mailto:mwiggins@nyso.org).

Teams who raise money will receive free Polar Plunge T-shirts, gift cards and more. There will also be prizes for the top fundraising team and the top individual fundraiser, as well as incentives for Brockport students who become actively involved. The Rochester Polar Plunge will be at Charlotte Beach at Ontario Beach Park Sunday, Feb. 8. Registration will begin at 9 a.m., and plunging will start at noon.

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