

PLUNGING *for a* CAUSE

**STAFF, STUDENTS FROM DOWNERS GROVE SOUTH
BRAVE COLD WATERS FOR SPECIAL OLYMPICS**



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SCHOOL NEWS >> DOWNERS GROVE SOUTH

Staff, students brave cold waters for cause

More than 50 students, staff participate in Feb. 18 for Special Olympics Illinois

BY MEGANN HORSTEAD

For the Bugle

@BugleNewspapers

sweditor@buglenewspapers.com

If there was ever a good reason to go swimming in Lake Michigan in February, members of the Downers Grove South High School community agreed this is it.

More than 50 students and staff members braved icy waters to participate in the Polar Plunge to support Special Olympics Illinois on Feb. 18.

Downers Grove South High School's team took a dip into the icy waters of Lake Michigan at Clark Street Beach in Evanston.

"This is the first year we've done it as a big school," said Jennifer Martinez, director of student activities. "We have a program—our D99 Hoops program, which is funded by Special Olympics [Illinois] to play basketball within our district for students with intellectual disabilities. So, they've done it on a smaller [scale]—maybe some staff members have done it. But this year, we had tons of students that registered and raised lots of money because it's our [school's

yearly] philanthropy focus."

Students participating in the Polar Plunge were required to raise a minimum of \$100 to earn a team sweatshirt.

"Many of them exceeded those expectations because our goal was to raise \$4,000," Martinez said.

Kevin Ahrens, vocational coordinator for the multi-needs program, participated in the Polar Plunge.

"The money goes to Special Olympics Illinois, and that gives our kids opportunities down the road to access different [recreational programs] during high school and post-high school," Ahrens said.

He said the community's support is exceptional.

"It was amazing to see the whole school get involved," Ahrens said. "To raise over \$10,000 is a quite an accomplishment. In year's past, we've had like four, six plungers. To have 53 [participants], is pretty amazing. That says a lot about our school."

DGS junior Anna Buie said she enjoyed the experience.

"I thought it was really fun to



get together with a good friends [to support] a charity that I'm passionate about," she said. "I interact with a lot of the kids who are in the special education program."

Buie said the high school does a wonderful job of making students with special needs feel connected to the campus.

"I think we have a really welcoming community," she said. "We have a lot of basketball teams, we have cheerleading with them, and I was also a [physical education] leader for a class with special education and general education kids, so we do a good job of inte-

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DGS senior Alexa Vitagliano, too, shared that sentiment.

"Specifically our school we have a huge special education program, and there's so many things you can do to help them or get involved with them," she said. "We have two different clubs, Friendship and Go Green—which I'm also in. It's general education and special education kids both working together. So, that helps [them in integrating] with general education kids and not just have

them separated with just each other."

Vitagliano said she often devotes time to coaching students with special needs, but to make a difference financially to support Special Olympics Illinois was unbelievable.

"I was not expecting to raise as much as I did," she said. "I ended up raising \$1,215. I put it on social media, all my friends and family just started donating, and it just took off. So, that made it more fun to actually do it for an important purpose."

This year was Vitagliano's first time participating in a Polar Plunge.

"I was nervous at first," she said. "It was my first one, and I heard it was really cold in the past. But, it was so nice out that I was like, 'OK, I got this.' We jumped in and it was cold, but it wasn't as bad as I heard in the past. It was fun."

In all, the team raised \$10,404.50. The high school's effort to support Special Olympics is a part of a yearlong philanthropy project. Contributions will be accepted through the end of April. To make a donation, visit

<http://soill.donordrive.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=donorDrive.event&eventID=608>