

# **Crowd makes splash at polar bear dip**

Tillsonburg News

January 4, 2024 Thursday

Final Edition

Copyright 2024 Tillsonburg News All Rights Reserved

**Section:** LOCAL; Pg. A1

**Length:** 434 words

**Byline:** Michelle Ruby, Tillsonburg News

**Body**

A large group of revellers braved the icy waters of Lake Erie Monday for a quick dip to mark the start of 2024.

Hundreds more remained on the sandy shore to catch a glimpse of the shivering participants in the Port Dover ***Polar Bear*** Dip, a New Year's Day tradition for four decades.

"It's pretty cold," said Siobhan Newton to the surprise of no one as she emerged from the water, where the temperature was close to the freezing mark.

Newton and Martin Miles-Moore, who live in Lancashire, England, were in Port Dover visiting friends over the holidays and decided to take the plunge. It's not the first time they've taken a ***polar*** paddle.

"Last year, we went swimming off the coast of Scotland in January," said Newton. "This is a brilliant thing to be part of."

A crowd of swimsuit-clad "***polar bears***" dashed across the sand and into the water at 1 p.m. Most weren't in the lake long enough to adhere to the rule that if one's head doesn't get wet, the dip doesn't count.

Kelly Darbishire of Port Dover and Mike Sobol of Elora got ahead of the crowd by taking their dip a little before the event's official start. They are veteran cold-water plungers who've taken winter swims in various locations in Ontario.

"It's fun, exciting, refreshing and rejuvenating," said Darbishire. "There is a certain level of health benefits."

Mario Stocco of Waterloo has done so many New Year's Day ***polar bear*** dips he has lost count.

"This is the mildest one I've ever done," he said. "Last year, the ice was so bad here we went to Long Point instead. It's a nice way to start the year. You set yourself up for doing things you might hesitate to do."

Faced with a dangerously bumpy ice sheet last year along the Port Dover beach - one large enough to cover a couple of football fields - ***polar bear*** dip participants opted to move closer to the pier and cut a hole in the ice.

"This is like going to Mexico," said Brad Davis of the comparatively balmy temperature on Monday. "The water is warmer than the air. But at a certain point, your lungs constrict and you can't breathe."

Sarah Scruton of Port Dover, wearing what she called a "cheeky" green bikini with her "whole bum out," said participating in the ***polar bear*** dip has been something she's wanted to do all her life.

"I decided this is the year to start saying yes to things," she said.

After the swim, some of the participants and their supporters headed to the Port Dover Harbour Museum for the 2024 Captain's ***Polar Bear*** Levee and Fiddle Party. Attendees were invited to bring their fiddles and other instruments to the New Year's Day shindig, which has been a tradition since 1983.

**Graphic**

Michelle Ruby; Brad Davis of Port Dover emerges victorious from the icy cold water of Lake Erie on New Year's Day during the annual Port Dover ***Polar Bear*** Dip.; Michelle Ruby; A big crowd took a dip in the icy water of Lake Erie on New Year's Day in the annual Port Dover ***Polar Bear*** Plunge.;

**Load-Date:** January 4, 2024

**End of Document**