

CANYON COURIER

Record crowd makes a splash at Evergreen Lake Plunge

By Stephen Knapp

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Everybody who participated in Drive Smart's much-anticipated eighth annual Evergreen Lake Plunge had her own reason to strip down and jump in.



Chancey Bush

Norm Hahn takes a breath after jumping into Evergreen Lake during the eighth annual Lake Plunge on New Year's Day.

For Drive Smart's executive director, Jackie Mohr, it may have been a case of leading by example. Mohr dreamed up the event back in 2009 and could hardly ask her neighbors to take a dip that she will not. In any case, by noon on New Year's Day, her cold-blooded brand of leadership appeared to have inspired a whole lot of hot-blooded emulation.

"We had 115 pre-registrations last year," Mohr said. "We had almost 200 this year."

Throw in a steady stream of walk-up lake-leapers, and this year's Plunge probably attracted close to 300 thick-skinned dunk-heads. On the other hand, Mohr might have needed the lake's bracing embrace just to stay awake. By midday Friday, she'd already been on the job for more than 30 hours overseeing everything from Drive Smart's early-bird youth hockey tournament last Thursday morning to the late-waking Skate the Lake celebration on New Year's Eve. In the end, though, Mohr may have taken the Plunge out of simple habit.

"Me and Dr. Regan are the only ones who've done the Plunge every single year," she said.

For that matter, not only has Paul Regan of Regan Orthodontics in Evergreen never missed a Plunge, in the last eight years he's inspired more than 70 others to follow him into the water as Team Brace Yourself.

"I jumped the first year with my children just for fun," said Regan, filling out the by-now-familiar liability waiver in the registration tent. "Now it's a tradition."

Joy Cox jumped because she wanted to make a splash on her 50th birthday. This year Drive Smart suggested that plungers find friends and loved ones willing to sponsor their recklessness, and Cox figured a donation to a worthy local cause beat a coffee gift card or another scented bathroom candle.

"It's not like I make a fuss over my birthday anymore," Cox said with a smile. "Instead of presents, I asked everyone to sponsor me."

Fact is, a lot of people probably find themselves up to their necks in Rocky Mountain ice water for no better reason than because they were invited to. Teams this year included the hard-hided Team Yeti, more than one squad from Evergreen High School, and a fearless foursome from the Colorado State Patrol. The thing about being on a team is that, in that heart-stopping moment when you're asked to take the long red-carpet walk to the edge of the ice under the gentle mockery of News 4 anchorman and longtime Plunge emcee Alan Gionet and submit your tender flesh to the lake's arctic kiss, it's hard to chicken out without everybody knowing it.

Take the team from Inspired Fitness, led by Evergreen exercise expert Dana Bair. It seems that Bair's cousins, Mississippi sisters Caroline, Kate and Libby Mattox, were visiting from the torrid South. You do for kin, of course, and the obliging trio agreed to slip into the attention-getting purple Inspired Fitness tutu and sample the local waters. Gasping in the 15-degree mountain air on Friday morning, however, the girls were beginning to suspect that Cousin Dana might not have their best interests at heart.

"It's pretty cold," shivered Libby, eyeing the dark waters without enthusiasm. "Who would jump in there?"

Libby would, that's who, and Kate, and Caroline, and for the very oldest of reasons.

"I'm not going to be the only one not doing it," said Kate, speaking for all three.

Besides, the Evergreen Fire/Rescue crew sloshing comfortably around in the Hole of Doom didn't seem particularly distressed. Then again, they weren't wearing flip-flops and bikinis.

"In this suit, the water is quite comfortable," yawned Neil Hailstone, one of a half-dozen dry-suit-clad EFR volunteers tasked with helping Plungers climb out of the freezing water and into the freezing atmosphere. "It's the folks in line who're going to get the shock and awe."

That line formed a giant fishhook reaching from water's edge to the Lake House door, and it took a solid hour of nonstop dunking to slake the lake's thirst for warm bodies. The Mattox sisters dutifully took their turn and, one after another, made the numbing dash along the shore to the Warming Hut for a cup of hot cocoa and some dry clothes.

There are other good reasons people dare the Evergreen Lake Plunge. For one thing, it's among the mountain area's most festive occasions, what with live music and colorful costumes and the spectacle of frail Man getting soundly whupped by implacable Nature. For another, every registration fee and sponsorship helps Drive Smart continue its important programs.

"We're the only local community-supported road-safety organization in the area," explained Mohr. "We depend on donations, and we give the community fun things to do in return."

Warmly dressed and feeling inclined to diplomacy, Libby graciously echoed Jackie's sentiment.

"It was worth it because it's for charity," intoned Libby, who may or may not be practicing for a run at Tupelo High's student senate. Caroline, on the other hand, was clearly thinking about the story she'll be able to tell all the hot-house orchids back in Ol' Miss.

"It was really, really cold," said Caroline, proud and not caring who knew it, "but it was worth it for the bragging rights."