

SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD

Portage Lakes Polar Bear Club



Each year, the **Portage Lakes Polar Bear Club** organizes increasing numbers of warm-hearted people willing to freeze their bodies by plunging into icy waters in order to raise funds for local charities. Maybe that explains why, despite the frigid waters, everyone emerging from the lake has a grin along with their goose bumps.

“Polar Bears” are as young as seven and as old as 65 and come dressed in tutus, body paint and other costumes. No matter their age or their attire, each jumper has collected pledges from family, friends and co-workers who have ventured out to watch them jump.

The club was created in 2003 by Kelly & Heather Pariso and Jeff & Debbie Fulkman. The first Jump was held on February 29, 2004. That was Leap Day, and the pun was definitely intended.

In its inaugural year, the Portage Lakes Polar Bear Jump attracted 74 jumpers and raised more than \$13,000. The number of participants has soared over the years. More than 800 jumpers raised over \$85,000 at the 2013 event! The jump has become a Portage Lakes tradition that ranks second only to the fireworks in terms of attendance.

During its ten-year history, the Portage Lakes Polar Bear Jump raised almost \$400,000 for local charities, including Akron Children’s Hospital, Haven of Rest Ministries, Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank, American Cancer Society, March of Dimes, Stewart’s Caring Place, and Camp Quality Ohio. The Jump has also helped to raise awareness of those in need as those brave jumpers are freezing their bodies to warm the hearts of others.

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