

Polar Bear Dip

Local karate students get set to take frosty plunge

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

Some people may break in January 1, 2000 nursing a hangover. But members of the Milton Tsuruoka Karate School will ring in the new millennium by plunging into the icy waters of Lake Ontario for the annual Polar Bear Dip.

As a reward, Tsuruoka school survivors get lunch, a glass of saki and a year's worth of bragging rights, said the school's chief instructor James Burke.

"We talk about it for weeks," he said. "The students have a ball. They just love it."

The group makes its mark on the event each year by getting decked out in full white karate regalia, leaping into the lake and doing a rapid — make that very rapid — succession of martial arts moves. All the while busting a gut howling the guttural karate cry keeyai.

"So you're shouting and shouting and shouting," said Mr. Burke. "We steal the show every time."

The group even draws attention before jumping in the lake.

"We rent a cube van and we're doing jumping jacks in it," he said. "People walk by and see the entire van is jumping up and down."

The school's chilly tradition began some four years ago at an affiliated Burlington karate school. It carried on when the Milton branch was formed two years ago.

"It's really a way of recommitting to our students and our students recommitting to us," said Mr. Burke. "It's something exciting and a little bit risky. It takes

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JAMES BURKE

you out of your comfort level."

But not too far out, he assured.

"It's not as terrible as it looks," said Mr. Burke. "Your adrenaline is way up, there's 2,000 people watching and you just go for it."

Oddly enough, flailing around water in sub-zero temperatures isn't the tough part.

It's trying to get out of the icicle encrusted uniforms afterwards.

"The worst part is changing because the uniform has ties on it," said Mr. Burke. "You're trying to get them off and your hands are numb."

Last year, a dozen karate students participated. About 20 are expected for the 2000 dip.

The event, which can garner about 300 plungers and 2,000 spectators, is hosted by World Vision, an international non-profit organization that does a lot of relief work.

Money is raised for the group through registration fees.

It will all kick off at noon New Year's Day Saturday at Confederation Park in Oakville.

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Drinkers staying off roads: police

Most Halton motorists were driving sober through the early part of the holiday season.

This according to statistics from Halton Regional Police's Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere (RIDE) program.

Between December 16 and 22, a total of 4,755 vehicles were checked throughout the region's four municipalities.

Of those, only 28 roadside tests were conducted and just three people were charged were impaired driving.

One of the charges was levied in Milton — where 1,200 vehicles were checked on December 21.

Police also laid 15 Highway Traffic Act charges during the stretch. A dozen of the counts came in Halton Hills December 16.

'Last Call' program offered to drinkers

Halton Regional Police and Milton watering holes want to ensure the only thing that ends at midnight Friday is the millennium — not any lives.

That's why they've once again implemented 'Last Call', an initiative designed to reduce drinking and driving.

The program provides patrons who have been drinking with coupons worth \$4 toward their taxi ride home. The incentive offers an alternative to driving under the influence.

Three dollars of the coupon is funded by the bar and the other comes courtesy of the Milton/Rainbow Cab Company.

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