

Mild conditions for Polar Splash

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

BELLE RIVER – It looked like conditions were more suited for a day at the beach than a Polar Bear Splash in Belle River Sunday, until participants hit the water.

“It’s darn cold,” said Essex resident Margaret Jackson, who raised \$2,400 in pledges along with her two sisters and niece for the 7th annual event.

All proceeds will go to the Essex Area Food Bank, and there was no shortage of supporters willing to throw on a bathing suit and test the waters of Lake St. Clair.

Some didn’t mind the chilly temperature as much as others.

“It’s great,” said Joe Malec of LaSalle. “When I first walked in my ankles were really cold, but I got used to it.”

Malec, who raised \$110 in pledges, even went ahead and dunked his head under water.

Australian native Jim Walsh had only been in Canada a few days when he decided to take the plunge. Malec, a member of the Belle River Rotary Club, convinced the Aussie to test the chilly waters of the Great White North.

“The water in Australia is not this cold,” Walsh joked.

Ward 1 councillor Randy Voakes made the trip from Essex to participate in the event.

He was approached by Essex Area Food Bank coordinator Eileen Clifford

to join in on the event for the first time.

“There’s obviously a need,” Voakes said. “If anybody can do something for the cause, no matter how big or small, it’ll help.”

In fact, the need is growing substantially, said Ken Skinner of the Essex Area Food Bank.

The charity feeds more than 1,000 families each month throughout the county.

“The need is getting bigger every year,” Skinner said. “We have many working poor. It seems at the end of the month, they have to go to a food bank to eat.”

The food bank is open to the public on Tuesdays and Thursdays at their location at Essex District High School. They often have about 75 people coming in each day, Skinner said. Needy families are given two or three large boxes of groceries.

“Our food bank is unique in that we buy chicken, cereal, vegetables...a lot of different items,” Skinner said.

He said it’s a common misconception that there isn’t as much of a need in the county compared to an urban centre.

“We don’t see many homeless people in the county because they’re all in the city,” he said. “All of the social services are there. We’re doing our part for the county.”

Eileen Clifford, founder of the Essex Area Food Bank, has organized the



Joshua Jackson, 12, kicks some cold water at his aunt Margaret Jackson during the 7th annual Polar Bear Splash in Belle River Nov. 26. The event drew dozens of participants who headed into Lake St. Clair for a quick dip. Proceeds from the event benefit the Essex Area Food Bank.

Polar Bear Splash for the past seven years.

Participants were encouraged to use pledge sheets to raise money for the charity.

“We have supporters all over the place – in schools, churches and individuals who want to help out,” Clifford said. “We are extremely busy.”

Clifford said part of the reason there is “much more of a need this year” is because of layoffs at the Big Three automotive plants in Windsor.

“The Big Three are kind of having problems and that causes a ripple effect,” she said. “I’ve had people turning off the gas in their homes. It’s a sad situation. Most of the public doesn’t realize the kind of need that’s out there.”

Receiving no government funding for the food bank, Clifford has put her faith in support from local residents.

“I think this community is fabulous,” she said. “I get help from everybody. I’ve been royally blessed.”



RETIREES SAY THANKS – Brian Gray, left, chair of the Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant Review Team, celebrates the awarding of a \$26,500 grant to the Essex Retirees Social Club with Michelle Mitchell and club president Floyd Cascadden. With the money received last June, the club made interior renovations, creating a large open space for new activities and programs. They also hired Mitchell as a part-time employee to recruit new members and promote the seniors centre.

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To the citizens of the Town of Essex I express a sincere thank you with a humbled heart filled with gratitude for the confidence and support you have shown me at the polls in my bid for a second term as your mayor.

To all of my dedicated, unwavering and loyal workers, what can I say? You know you are always in my heart and prayers. I know I would not have been successful without each and everyone of you and your many hours. To my past council, the growing pains, the team work, successes and achievements of our past three years have laid the groundwork of a firm foundation for our community to only grow stronger. It is through your tireless efforts on behalf of the citizens of Essex that has given me, as your mayor, our record as a team that was willing to work together for our citizens and communities.

I sincerely thank one and all and will continue to strive in the next four years toward the goal we have charted for our community - forward - united - for the betterment of all.

In heartfelt appreciation
- Ron McDermott

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