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ALERT TOP STORY

Corvallis community members slide in to the new year

Maddie Pfeifer

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Lindy Brownback went down the water slide with her son Hunter Kalodimos, 5, on Saturday.

Kylie Graham Mid-Valley Media

Maddie Pfeifer

Peter Hoegg was the first one down the slide. The 78-year-old has been celebrating the beginning of a new year at the Osborn Aquatic Center for as long as the facility has had its “Polar Brrr Swim” celebration.

Hoegg went down the slide five times this year. He said he's hoping to be the oldest one out there.

"I just like it, and I like going down the slide," he said. Hoegg said he also participates in the Polar Plunge each year, where participants run into Crystal Lake to raise money for Special Olympics Oregon.



Snow falls on Southwest Easy Street in Corvallis.

Cody Mann

While the aquatic center's event was not a fundraiser, couples and families showed up to the pool on Saturday afternoon to start their 2022 with a splash. The annual event is a big hit and a tradition for some like Hoegg.

But there were also some there for the first time.

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CeeAnn Callahan and her husband John were first-timers this year. Callahan said this was a great way to kick off 2022.

“It’s good to try something different and to push yourself to try new things,” she said.

Children as young as two years old went down the slide Saturday afternoon. Families gathered together, took photos with the polar bear mascot in attendance and cheered each other on as they came down the twisting slide.

The event has become a staple in the community and is a unique way to celebrate new beginnings.

“It means a lot of things to different people,” aquatic program coordinator Dawn Rhoads said. “It’s an opportunity for families to come together and be adventurous. And it’s an inclusive event for the community.”

Rhoads added that the event wouldn’t be possible if the staff hadn’t shown up and worked on the holiday. She said it was amazing to see the lifeguards and other staff come out to make the event happen, especially with staffing shortages happening in many industries.

Those daring enough to brave the cold weather ran up the stairs to the slide, waited their turn and then emerged with a splash into the pool. The heated pool ensured that swimmers weren’t too cold when entering the water, but many shivered as they stepped into the frigid air.

Beth Thompson said her son Conor didn’t seem to be fazed by the cold. The whole family came to watch Conor go down the slide. Thompson said her son had been looking forward to this New Year’s swim at the aquatic center since the summer.

After going down the slide one, two, even three times, community members went inside to use the indoor pool and spend the holiday with friends and family.

The Polar Brrr Swim made a triumphant return this year, and Hoegg is already looking towards the future.

“I’m going to keep coming back as long as I can,” he said.

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