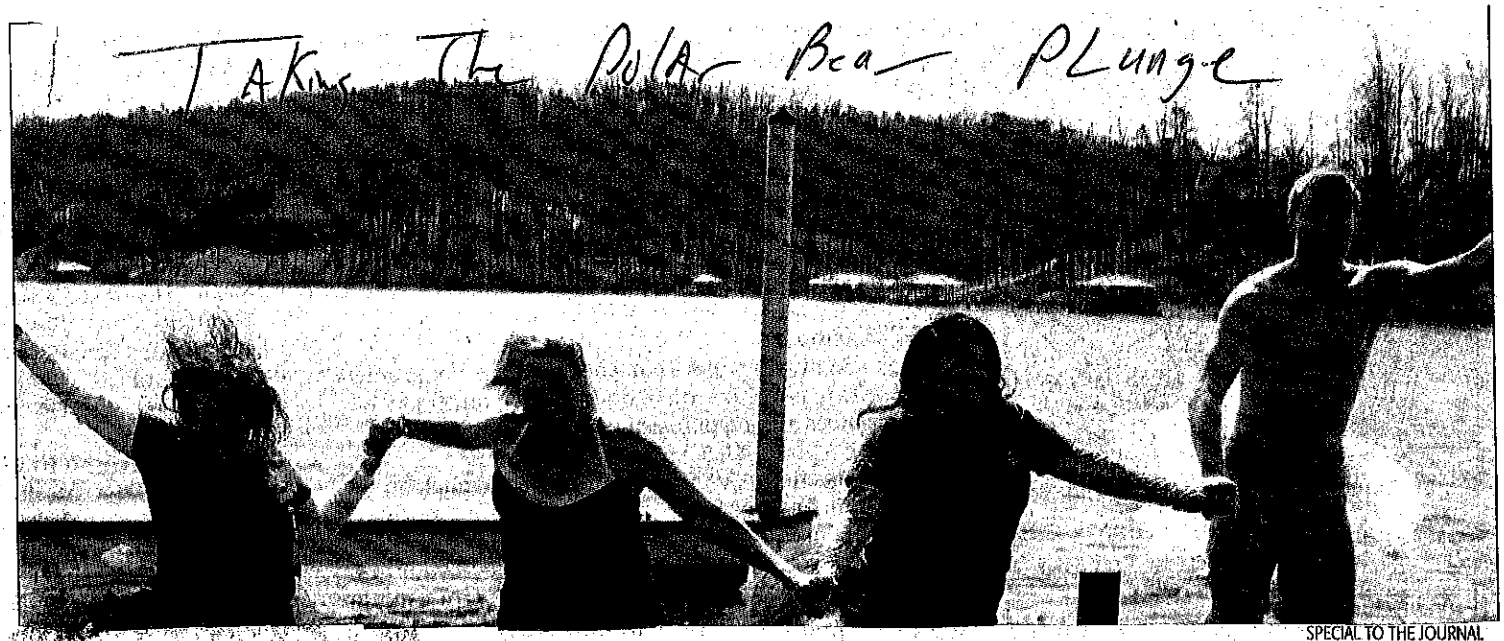
Taking The Polar Bear Plunge



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

More than 50 people plunged into the frigid water of Lake Keowee on Saturday to benefit Safe Harbor. Hosted by the Seneca Junior Woman's Club, the 6th annual Freezin' for a Reason Polar Bear Plunge raised about $5,000.

BY STEPHANIE JADRNICEK
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — The water in Lake Keowee is much warmer than this time last year, but it still felt frigid to the people participating in the 6th annual Freezin' for a Reason Polar Bear Plunge.

Hosted by the Seneca Junior Woman's Club, the event raised about $5,000 for Safe Harbor from sponsors, jumpers and a silent auction. Safe Harbor is a shelter for victims of domestic abuse in Oconee County.

Business owner Laurie Collins and her daughter, Courtney Collins, have joined in on the fundraiser for several years and participated in Saturday's plunge as well.

"We were probably lucky this year with the weather being so warm, the water was a little bit warmer, too," Laurie said. "But it still felt like jumping into ice water."

As always, the plunge took place at the Lake Keowee Lighthouse. Prior to the plunge everyone gathered on the grounds at the lighthouse for some light activity to get the blood moving.

Younger children jumped in bounce houses, older kids and adults played a few rounds of corn hole and everybody danced at the cabana.

Once they worked up enough body warmth and courage, they jumped off the dock in small groups of no more than five folks at a time. Although the cold water may have knocked the breath out of the plungers, they knew their efforts were for a good cause.

Safe Harbor's Oconee shelter provides an emergency safe place for domestic violence victims but also a safe place to start a new life. With a vision of influencing a culture where all people are safe and valued in their relationships, the shelter provides a continuum of services for victims of domestic violence and their children while working to eliminate the cultural acceptance of domestic violence through a coordinated community response, prevention and education.

Safe Harbor's 16-bed Oconee shelter opened its doors for the first time in August 2014 and was full within 48 hours. The shelter consistently operates at or near capacity, highlighting the great need for domestic violence services and prevention programs in Oconee County.

In 2016, it provided shelter for 76 women and 67 children. It also provided individual counseling services, transitional housing services and prevention/education outreach throughout Oconee County.

Safe Harbor program director Julie Meredith said events like the Polar Bear Plunge not only help to raise needed funds for Safe Harbor's mission, but also help to raise community awareness that local support exists in the Oconee community for survivors of domestic violence and their families.

"An awareness of resources and help can be a key factor for victims as they are making the difficult and courageous decision to safely leave an abusive relationship," she said. "We are so thankful to our Oconee community for their generous support and fierce advocacy for ensuring that victims of domestic violence have the support they need."

With nearly 30 sponsors, the Polar Bear Plunge was a huge success. Safe Harbor director of development and communications Amanda Manly said the nonprofit's staff and volunteers are so grateful to the Seneca Junior Woman's Club for continuing its amazing support, and to all of the brave souls who jumped in the lake for Safe Harbor.

"The funds raised by the Polar Bear Plunge help ensure that Safe Harbor can continue to carry out its mission in Oconee County, providing crisis services to victims of domestic violence and their children, and working on prevention initiatives to make our community a safer place to live," she said.

Seneca Junior Woman's Club is a member of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Nine active junior clubs across South Carolina come together to honor the motto of "Unity in Diversity" by dedicating time to community improvement through activities, projects or fundraising.

"Our mission is to enhance the lives of others through volunteer service," Seneca Junior Woman's Club president Jennifer Tonkin said. "We continue to support Safe Harbor because the issue of domestic violence continues. Safe Harbor depends on the generosity of people and organizations like us. Without the support of the community, programs like this would not exist."

stephanie@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6686