

UMaine Greeks to Take the Plunge for Penobscot Boys and Girls Club Fundraiser

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ORONO – Dozens of UMaine fraternity and sorority members will doff their duds at 2 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 10, for the first Greek Life polar bear dip to benefit the Boys and Girls Club of the Penobscot Nation.

Forecasters are predicting Saturday's highs to reach only 20 degrees, but Michelle Morneault, president of the Greeks' Panhellenic Council at UMaine, expects as many as 60 to 75 fraternity and sorority members will be willing to take the plunge on the UMaine Mall on Saturday. Students have been collecting pledges throughout the week in anticipation of the bone-chilling event, but since this is the first Greek Life polar bear dip, neither Morneault nor Dylan Moody, a graduate assistant in the Greek Life Office, know how much money will be raised.

"We're hoping for a big crowd," says Morneault, a junior elementary education major from Madawaska. "We welcome all sponsors, certainly, to help benefit the Boys and Girls Club. "We're doing all we can to get word out there to all the Greeks and we'll see how it goes."

They would like to make the polar bear dip an annual event.

On Indian Island, Carla Fearon, director of the tribe's Boys and Girls Club, says any help is greatly appreciated.

"I am extremely grateful," Fearon says. "There were a lot of nervous looks at first, but when they got back to me collectively, they decided that this would be one of their projects for nonprofits. What they're doing for the children here, to me, is a huge gift. I hope they continue to do it. I hope they have fun."

Moody and Morneault say the Orono Fire Department will fill a portable pool at the top of the Mall, near Fogler Library, about noon. Supporters will set up a changing and warming tent with hot chocolate for the dippers. Campus emergency safety personnel will be standing as a precaution, adds Morneault, who plans to be among those making a splash.

UMaine has a total of seven sororities and 15 fraternities with a total membership of about 700 students. Those taking a dip on Saturday will generate points that go toward a friendly rivalry among the fraternities and sororities that have been celebrating Winter Carnival this week. The fundraiser on Saturday comes at the tail-end of the carnival and in the middle of Family and Friends Weekend.

The Boys and Girls Club serves 75-100 children daily, from kindergarten through grade 12, with a variety of free educational, nutritional and recreational activities, according to Fearon. More than 200 youths from many area communities are members of the club.

"The Boys and Girls Club serves all children who want to participate and is 100 percent free," she says. Participation is not limited to tribal members.

The center, adjacent to the Penobscots' elementary school on Indian Island, provides meals, arts and crafts, a computer lab, game room and a gymnasium. Students learn about cooking and nutrition, career choices and fitness, among other life skills, Fearon says.

Morneault says the idea for the polar bear dip originated with a batch of about 40 letters she recently sent out to area nonprofits, offering the services of the Greeks at UMaine to help with charitable events.

For more information or to make a pledge for a polar bear dipper, Morneault or Moody can be reached at 581-4162. Anyone is welcome to participate and contribute a donation to the cause, Morneault says.