

Grand Forks Herald

“Chill bites GF endodontist in lake plunge”

By Ryan Bakken

January 27, 2008

So, you think you've been cold lately?

Meet Bob Panther.

Panther is a Grand Forks endodontist, a fancy title for a dentist who performs root canals. What he did recently, for most of us, would be as much fun as . . . well . . . getting a root canal.

He jumped into 36-degree water.

On purpose.

And paid money for the privilege.

He was among 37 people who jumped into Lake Bemidji as part of the Brrrrmidji Polar Daze events. The event is called the Polar Plunge. And this year's event was as polar as a white bear.

The temperature at plunge time was 10 to 15 below. The wind chill approached 30 below.

“Jumping into that water hiked up the metabolism a bit,” Panther said.

He was planning to participate in the Polar Daze ski event, but that was canceled because of the cold. So, he then planned to instead enter the 5K run/walk, but that, too, was nixed by the cold. But half-naked plunges? Good to go.

“Jokingly, my office brought up that maybe I should go jump in the lake,” Panther said. “The gauntlet was thrown down then. You might say it was a dare.”

The dare was taken, so Panther took the leap “wearing trunks, water shoes and a smile.”

The smile disappeared quickly once he hit the water. “You didn't want to stay in the water, but you didn't want to get out either,” he said. “The chilly part was getting out. The warming tent was a 20-foot sprint, which was about 20 feet too far.”

Without the cold, there is no point to the plunge. It wouldn't be nearly as much fun in October. The 5th annual event had its second-highest number of participants and raised \$2,300 for the Special Olympics. Participants had to donate a minimum of \$25.

“We always hold this the third week of January, which is traditionally the coldest part of the year,” said Dave Geiger, the organizer. “What we're trying to do is provide opportunities other than sitting indoors and thinking that life here really sucks in the winter.”

The colder the weather, the better the entertainment: "The reaction shots of when they hit the water is something you can't fake," Geiger said.

Perhaps suffering the most shock were two visiting Australians. They arrived straight from Down Under's summer, in the middle of a heat wave of triple-digit temperatures.

"I don't think they really knew what they were getting into until they hit the water," Geiger said. "They were talking Australian machismo. But once they hit the water, they couldn't get out fast enough."

And George Costanza thought he suffered shrinkage?

Meanwhile, Panther is contemplating a return plunge.

"I can't rule it out," he said. "It was a lot of fun."

Maybe by root canal standards, that is.