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Snowman Race Provides Challenge and Chuckles Galore

February 10, 2009 - PORTLAND -- There was no way to know a week before Portland's first Snowman Adventure Race that a woman would show up in a bear costume and others would dress up as Superman, Zorro and a cow.

Last March, Snowman race director Pat Hackleman added the costume component of this unique event just a week before runners and bikers lined up for it.

So how do you explain dozens of decorated adults coming out in capes and wings to race – in a snowstorm, no less?

Hey, this is Maine.

"I was teetering on postponing it the night before. People actually called me and said they wanted to do it in the worst conditions. And that is why they signed up," Hackleman said. "It became a cult classic."

The second annual adventure race on Feb. 21 is a two-person team event staged at the Eastern Promenade for spectator viewing – and sweet sledding opportunity.

It will begin with one competitor running up and sledding down the Eastern Prom, then biking out and around the Back Cove. At the handoff, the other teammate will sled down the hill before running two-and-a-half miles around the Eastern Prom to the top of the hill, where they join their teammate for a final sled ride to the finish.

Last year's inaugural Snowman was speedy, snowy, sloshy and goofy. In other words, a success.

Seventy-four people showed up to race in driving snow and freezing temperatures, and most of them came in disguise.

"It added a lightness to the event," said Anders Larsen of South Portland, an expert mountain-bike racer who won last year's Snowman with his 14-year-old daughter, Linnea.

"Kudos to the people who did it in nasty weather," he said. "I was cycling in five inches of hard snow. I worked probably as hard as I've worked in a race."

Hackleman expects many to return this year, but has no aspirations to grow the field into more than a few hundred participants.

He said the Snowman is simply a way to rally outdoor enthusiasts together to celebrate winter.

And, of course, an excuse to inspire a costume parade along Casco Bay.

"Now it's almost a prerequisite to dress up. You'll be out of place if you're not dressed in a costume," Hackleman said. "Dressing up is as fun as the event itself. Would you rather run two miles in regular clothes, or run two miles in a costume?"

The Snowman is but one event Hackleman and his wife, Reggie, run through Casco Bay Sports, a company that offers an assortment of adult coed sporting leagues in Portland throughout the year. For this event, the Hacklemans will donate all proceeds to Portland Trails.

So long as people keep showing up dressed as superheroes and cartoon characters, Hackleman said, he will keep holding the Snowman.

"If I didn't get the response I got last year, I don't know if I would do it again. But there was so much spirit -- and the costumes," Hackleman said. "I guess I just like the idea of how unique it is."

DEIRDRE FLEMING, Portland Press Herald, February 5, 2009

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