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# Cedar Grove/Verona NEWS

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## Former Verona Resident Freezes For Special Olympics

By Maryanne  
Christiano-Mistretta

Jumping into ice cold water is not pleasurable; David Coppola will not lie about that. But for a great cause, he's proud to call himself the "Mascot Extraordinaire" for his team that does the Polar Bear Plunge in Seaside Heights every year for the Special Olympics.

The Pompton Lakes resident, formerly of Verona, is planning to participate in the Polar Bear Plunge on Sat., Feb. 25. This is one of the major fundraisers for Special Olympics New Jersey, which provides year-round sports training, competition, leadership opportunities, and health screenings to more than 25,000 athletes - and athletic competition in sports from alpine skiing to vol-

leyball for children and adults with intellectual disabilities.

All these programs and services are always completely free thanks to fundraising events like the Polar Plunge. For example, \$25 is the cost of 10 Special Olympics gold medals; \$50 sends one athlete to fall games; \$100 provides one adaptive bowling ramp; \$250 provides uniforms for an entire basketball team; \$500 reserves tennis courts for sectional competition; and \$1,000 sends an entire floor hockey team to the State Tournament.

Special Olympics NJ is a not-for-profit organization. Those interested in plunging must register in advance and must raise \$100 minimum in order to participate.

Coppola lost track of

when he started doing this, but he said this could be the seventh or eighth year. This year they are putting in an extra effort to raise money in honor of Joe Riley who got the team together and passed away a month ago.

Coppola's team is called The Polar Penguins. His son designed the banners and then Coppola decided to dress as a penguin to "go with it." The Polar Penguins logo is on the outfit that his son designed and he also wears a cape with the banner.

Each year The Polar Penguins raise more money for the cause. In the first year, \$2,000 was raised. Last year, it was close to \$8,000. Coppola hopes to raise \$10,000. "You never know," he said. "If it's more, we'll be grateful."

Regarding competing

with other teams, Coppola said, "It's a win-win situation. There are no losers, only people who win because you raise money."

Special Olympics isn't the only cause Coppola is helping. He also works as director of development of Emmaus for Veterans, which is working to build a living and training space for homeless veterans in Philipsburg. The 8,000-sq. ft. building will house approximately 50 vets and will be set up to teach various trades to the vets in residence.

"Why Philipsburg?" said Coppola. "It's cheaper. It's too much money over here in Northern New Jersey."

Coppola, who graduated Verona High School in 1976, still has ties to Verona, as his father, a 92-year-



old World War II and Korean War veteran, still lives there.

Polar Bear Plunge, visit: <https://www.classy.org/fundraise/?cid=787248>.

To donate to Coppola's

## Local Police Department's Body Cameras Bring Another Point of View

By Henry M. Holten

Miniature cameras have become a ubiquitous part of life.

Those who have cell phones already have one. In recent years, cell phone cameras have been used to record some questionable law enforcement activities.

But also in recent years, law enforcement agencies

have begun equipping their personnel with body cameras. These cameras provide another point of view, the civilian's behavior in a confrontation with law enforcement.

These cameras are designed to "promote transparency, mutual accountability, and trust between police and the community," according to the state Attorney General's Office.

General's Office.

The Cedar Grove and Verona Police Departments are among 37 New Jersey law enforcement agencies to get state funding to buy their officers body cameras.

Verona, Cedar Grove and Nutley are among the Essex County towns that will receive funding as part of a \$566,000 grant from the New Jersey Attorney

General's Office.

"We're rapidly reaching the tipping point where most of the police departments in New Jersey will have body cameras, and the remaining departments are likely to follow suit," said Director Elie Honig of the Division of Criminal Justice. "Police departments recognize that these devices

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### Body Cameras...

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es are powerful tools for promoting mutual accountability and trust between police and the communities they serve."

The grants will use funds from the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant ("JAG") Program. Agencies can use up to \$500 in grant funds for each camera or camera package, including camera and related equipment, officials said.

Nutley, Verona and Cedar Grove each received \$15,000, which can support 30 body cameras for each department.

According to Lieutenant Joseph Cirasa, it is unclear when his officers might begin using the cameras on

duty, but estimated that it might happen "sometime in 2017."

"We've made positive police-community relations a top priority in New Jersey through policies and programs that have been embraced by law enforcement and community stakeholders alike, including our efforts to promote the use of body cameras by police," Attorney General Christopher S. Porrino said in a press release.

"The Cedar Grove Police Department has 31 officers but no body cameras," Township Manager Tom Tucci said. "Adding the cameras to the officers' gear will be a positive improvement for the department.

"What body cameras do is they protect the officer and they protect the resident, so they protect both sides of the fence," Tucci said. "Everyone wins with body cameras, I believe."

The number of police departments in N.J. that have body cameras or are acquiring them has reached more than 240, about half of the roughly 500 law enforcement agencies in the state, according to the Attorney General's Office.

With body cameras, there will no longer be a question of what happened during an altercation. If a complaint is made against an officer, they will be able to check the body camera video and see whether the officer was acting inappropriately or if the complaint is accurate. This will be helpful with training officers and improving the relationship between the public and police.

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