

The big chill

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<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/010313/polarSM.png>



Unlike the first day of 2012, when temperatures were well above freezing, 2013 began with conditions that made New Year's Day revelers earn their Polar Bear bragging rights. Temperatures were well below freezing, ice covered the bushes and breakwater at the far north end of the Port Washington marina, and a snow-covered shore punished anyone who took the plunge barefoot. Yet these were the conditions Polar Bears live for, and into the icy water they went, some wearing costumes (see Sponge Bob Square Pants in the upper right photo) as crazy as the idea of swimming in Lake Michigan in January. The only problem was the water, or lack thereof. Much of the Polar Bear swimming area between the shore and a marina dock has disappeared because of near-record low lake levels, but the Polar Bears adapted to the consequence of climate change by taking turns splashing in the small area of water that remains.

Photos by Sam Arendt