

Frigid temps greet Polar Bear racers

Story & Picture
Terri Licking

Mitch Glidden and his wife, Patty, needed to bring people to the area during slack tourist season. It prompted the Gliddens to organize a winter race in stock tanks on the Middle Loup River near Mullen. Mitch was the originator of the “true Nebraska sport” of tanking, years before this year’s 12th annual Polar Bear Tank Race ever began. The Gliddens own Sandhills Motel and Glidden Canoe rentals. Hooker County and Thomas County both benefit from the race, as accommodations are also available at Thedford’s Roadside Inn. Local service stations, stores and other businesses in both communities are also available to fill racers’ needs. The visitor’s committees from Hooker and Thomas counties, Custer Public Power, and Consolidated Telephone assist the Gliddens in sponsorship.

Events began Friday, March 1, with a soup cook-off and the race took place Saturday, March 2. Brenda Masek, Purdum, who has never missed emceeing both nights, could not attend Saturday’s awards segment due to the cold and calving.

This was only the third or fourth time racers had to don full winter gear.

“If I fall over, I’ll need help getting up with all

the layers I have on,” said Sharon “Mimi” Axiline, who with her husband, Harold, of Dorchester, have attended every year. The couple has been married for over 50 years and usually brings others from their community. They were the only two braving this year’s cold temperatures. They raced the first year, but now prefer to leisurely float along and admitted using oars a little more than usual this year.

Glidden uses actual steel tanks used in pasture to water cattle.

“It’s easier to pound out dents when tanks hit trees than to try to plug holes,” he said.

Glidden puts tanks in 12 months out of the year since the Middle Loup is spring fed and the stretch of river he uses for tanking never freezes. He attributes his success to the landowners along the river he works with, in providing this unique tourism venue.

Racers come from as far away as Omaha, Lincoln and Iowa, as well as Colorado and Missouri. Teams of four to six are needed for a racing team. Floaters can bring as many as can fit into the nine-foot stock tank. Sandbars do stop a tank, especially when it is loaded with a half-a-ton of men (8 or 9). Every tank is equipped with benches, life jackets and four oars.

The Gliddens have also made the PBTR a fundraiser for the Sand-

hills Journey Scenic Byway (SJSB) and over the years the venue has raised over \$50,000.

Winners at the soup cook-off included:

Best decorated table and best-named honors went to Luau on the Loup. Six friends from Randolph High School meet at Mullen to renew memories and make new ones. Homes of the ladies are now in Colorado, Missouri, and Nebraska communities, including Randolph. They were dressed in Hawaiian shirts and leis and brought a soup to enter in the cook-off. Two wine bottles were adorned with “Luau on the Loup” labels.

Mimi and Harold Axiline won best soup with their chili. They also brought pineapple and coconut deer sausage.

All won prize money that was donated back to be split between the PBTR and the Mullen Art Center.

Racing teams or floaters (they prefer not to work up a sweat) came prepared with props and decorations for themselves and their tanks. Race day begins with a good, hot breakfast of biscuits and gravy provided by the 4-H marksmen of Hooker County members, Ethan Hardin, Issy Hoyt, Hannah and Jessa O’Brien, and Daniel Wright.

Dawn Mallory, co-owner of Chuckwagon ‘N Jug restaurant with her husband, Gregg, judged the



The Shivering Sisters, the last of the five racing teams get launched in the snow during the 12th Annual Polar Bear Tank Race held on the Middle Loup River.

tanks the morning of the race. She also filled in for Masek as emcee on Saturday evening. The couple provides the cash bar both nights and a great prime rib supper for the awards banquet.

“I had a tough time judging the tank decorations. Several were worthy in the originality of costume,” Dawn said.

Shivering Sisters won first place. Two of the four-person team were “tanking virgins.” They had never tanked nor been in the PBTR before. They decorated themselves with large black trash bags, white collars, and the edge of their tank was adorned with a very

large rosary. The team said they would be coming back next year.

“In spite of the cold weather we had a blast,” they said.

Second place best decorated tank went to “Red Ants on the Loup.” They were dressed in red with caps that looked like antennae. They decorated their tank with red and white plastic table cover that had ants crawling on it. They also brought a picnic basket with a very large ant on top.

Eleven tanks were launched on race day with only five racing. Six teams were “floaters.”

Could Be Team won first place for the second straight year with members Dennis Whitfield, sons, Colby, Kyle and Tracy. Their time was 1:15:09.

Second place went to the A team with a time of 1:17:54. Members were Jeremy Glidden, Trent

Walz, Justin Tolle, Tony Corbin and Dan Avery.

Third place went to Felicia McKitterick, Brielle David, Sutton Spanton, and Christine Karell. Karell Kritters included four ladies dressed like a Holstein cow, a fox, a frog, and Bugs Bunny.

Shivering Sisters came in fourth with a time of 1:38:27 with team members Tammy Drommond, Denise Baucke, BJ Wilson and Vonie Weaver. The 4 B’s with members Lori McMullen, Katie Corbigg, Rachael Peters and Kim Schofield came in fifth with a time of 1:49:03.

The Mullen Art Center organized a Poker Run after the race.

Photographers this year were Terri Licking, SJSB president, Thedford; SJSB director, Linda Teahon, Dunning; and a camera was loaned to Mary Peebles, Denver, who was one of the Luau Ladies on the Loup.

Special dedication at Polar Bear Tank Race

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Mullen - Twelve years of the Polar Bear Tank Race at Mullen was observed March 1 and 2. After twelve years, a lot of water has flowed under the finish line since Mitch and Patty Glidden organized this winter time fun in 2007. Several participants have gone to the ‘rivers in the sky’ and are remembered at the annual soup cook-off on Friday evening every year. The cook-off is held prior to the Saturday race.

This year, Dan Burianek, team member of the Jolly Rogers, one of the original teams, brought back a wooden memorial, made from a cedar tree that at one time grew along the Middle Loup River. The memorial is dedicated to Adrian Jensen, Patty Glidden’s son, who passed away shortly before last year’s race. Jensen was a member of the River Rats, another charter team of



The Whitfields with Denny holding the memorial to Adrian Jensen presented to their team by Dan Burianek. The memorial will be passed on every year to another team so Adrian will always be tanking during the annual Polar Bear Tank Race.

the PBTR and always helped wherever needed. A silver plaque with the

inscription 2018 Jolly Rogers graces one side of the memorial, while the

top is carved with the words, Polar Bear Tanking Race, In honor of our captain, Adrian Jensen, River Rats, 5.6.57. Burianek gifted the traveling memorial to another charter team, whose name this year was Could Be and consisted of Whitfield clan members, patriarch Denny, sons Colby, Kyle and Tracy. They had it in their tank during the race, which brought them luck as they finished the race in first place for the second year in a row with a time of 1 hour, fifteen minutes and 9 seconds. They will place their name on their own silver plaque under the first and bring it back next year to hand off to another team.

Mintle named NPCC Business Student of the Month



COURTESY PHOTO

A Thedford woman has been selected as North Platte Community College’s Business Student of the Month for March.

Danya Mintle was nominated for the recognition by three of her instructors, Cathy Nutt, Jean Condon and Lynn Lupomech.

“Danya is a delightful young woman who takes her education seriously,” said Nutt. “She goes above and beyond with her assignments and strives to do the best job possible. At the same time, she is very personable and gets along with her peers - even assisting them with homework or concepts when they need it. Danya is deserving of the student of the month award because of her dedication to excellence and commitment to professionalism in all that she does.

Mintle graduated from Thedford High School in

2012. She is currently studying business administration with an accounting emphasis.

“I originally wanted to come to NPCC to get any degree so I could support myself,” said Mintle. “I then found that I enjoy numbers and helping others with business-type problems. NPCC and its faculty helped me discover my interests and what I would like to do for a living.”

Mintle is on track to graduate in May of 2020. Her goals are to become a certified public accountant, work in an accounting office and eventually become an auditor.

Mintle is a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. Her interests outside of school include music, art and reading.

She is the daughter of Sylvia Mintle of Thedford.

Notices

- Thedford Public Schools Board of Education Meeting Notice
- Thomas County Board Of Commissioners Proceedings

Weather Symposium

A Region 26 Weather Symposium will be held Friday, March 15, from 4 until 7 p.m. at Sandhills Public School, Dunning. There will be food and door prizes, free admission, and you will be able to ride on the roll-over simulator. Something for everyone!

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