



Carl Kleck, top, and Charles DiGiovanna swim ashore in Southport Harbor on New Year's Day after jumping into the frigid water in honor of DiGiovanna's son, Shane, 10, who suffers from epidermolysis bullosa, a fragile skin disease. PHIL NOEL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Brave souls take plunge for charity

By Richard Weizel
STAFF WRITER

FAIRFIELD — In 2000, Thomas Lawlor and his friend, Claudio Sauza, new fathers at the time, decided to kick off the millennium by doing something dramatic — jumping into the frigid waters of Southport Harbor on New Year's Day.

Nine years later, they kept the Ninth Annual Farcical Aquatic Ceremony alive Thursday morning, and were joined by more than 20 other men and one woman on what Lawlor described as “by far the coldest day yet,” with water temperatures — at 43 degrees — “that felt like the North Pole.”

“We couldn't even jump off the usual dock area because it was piled high with ice, we had to walk over solid ice and jump off some rocks,” said Lawlor, 47. “When I hit the icy water and went under I was instantly numb from head to toe. I was just 2 feet under, but I didn't know if I would make it back to the top. I was literally frozen.”

Lawlor said it was even

To help

For more information on epidermolysis bullosa, visit www.ebkids.org.

too cold for a bagpiper brought in for the ceremony, Bill McCormack, to wear a kilt or play more than two songs on his frozen instrument.

Lawlor explained that while the event's name is derived from a scene in the classic film “Monty Python and the Holy Grail,” the New Year's Day plunge is now dedicated to raising money for a little known fragile skin disease — epidermolysis bullosa.

Lawlor said this is the second year the group dedicated the plunge in honor of 10-year-old Shane DiGiovanna, a fourth-grade student at Mill Hill School in Fairfield who suffers from the often fatal disease. Shane was at the event Thursday and his father, Charles, was among those who “took the plunge,” Lawlor said.

“We raised \$4,000 from the people who jumped in and



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Shane DiGiovanna, 10, waves to friends as he and his father, Charles, walk out to Ye Yacht Yard in Southport to watch friends jump into Southport Harbor.

sponsors,” Lawlor said.

Lawlor said only one woman — Amy Dutter, of

Fairfield — was among those who jumped into the icy harbor.