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PENGUIN DIVES IN, THE ICE IS OUT IN NEWPORT!

After months of waiting, spring finally made it's appearance in Newport this past Saturday, at 4:09AM to be exact. The Lake Memphremagog Ice Out Contest, now in it's 7th year, garnered a record 1,876 guesses and the largest ever cash prize.

"Last week's warm spell was possibly one of the most climactic endings the Ice Out contest has had in a while," said Jessica Booth, Director of Parks & Recreation. "Everywhere I went I would hear people talking about the weather and how 'it's gotta go any day now.'" She says the number of guesses for the contest almost doubled during last week alone with the pot shooting up over a thousand dollars just from predictions submitted on Thursday and Friday.

Lake Memphremagog Ice Out guesses came in from across the country this year with entries from all New England states and some from farther out too, like Georgia and Texas. A few optimistic Vermonters had hoped the ice would go out as early as February 26th while the latest guess came in for June 16th at 2:30PM.

Saturday, March 27th was the celebratory day for 2020, when Parks & Recreation staff began getting mixed reports about the status of the mascot around sunrise. "There was some pretty crazy wind on Friday night, so we weren't sure if it had really sunk or if it had just blown over again," said Jessica Booth. The plywood facade had flipped over from high wind earlier in the month, but was rescued by Fire Chief John Harlamert who traversed the ice in full wet gear just in case. "When we got to the park on Saturday morning, the Ice Out clock was stopped but we could still see the mascot floating in the water. We figured it would be best to paddle out and double check to make sure it wasn't sitting on submerged ice or something. These things have to be very official, you know," she said with a smile. After the team confirmed that the weights had indeed sunk, the official Ice Out Time of 4:09AM was penned into the history books.

After remaining tickets were collected and submissions reviewed, the announcement Monday morning was most exciting to Newport Center resident Jason Patenaude who had submitted predictions for the third year in a row. His winning guess of 4:02AM on 3/27/21 was just seven minutes ahead of the actual time, the closest in the 7 year history of the game. Jason is a contestant with a strategy. "I like to keep an eye on it and I knew with the wind in the forecast it was going to melt the ice really quickly," he said. Friday night he stopped at the Pick and Shovel and purchased over 50 tickets with guesses through the night at 22 minute intervals. Why 22? He shared that his daughter's basketball jersey number is 22, which is no doubt his new lucky number. Jason took home \$2000.50, as his half of the 50/50 cash prize and while he's not in a rush to see ice on Lake Memphremagog anytime soon, he's certain he'll be submitting guesses again next winter.

The Lake Memphremagog Ice Out contest is an annual fundraiser hosted by the Newport Recreation Committee. This year the event brought in \$4,001.00 total, with half the donations benefiting improvements at Gardner Memorial Park. Official rules and contest details can be found online at www.NewportRecreation.org/ICEOUT.

