

Issued 02/02/04

STARTS

Polar Challenge Press Release

Polar Challenge 2004 (http://www.wpa.org.uk/general/polar_challenge.html) is the second ever race to take place from Resolute Island (Northern Canada) to the Magnetic North Pole. Only 400 people have ever been to either of the world's Poles (as opposed to 1500 who have climbed Mount Everest). Each of the ten teams, selected from around the globe will consist of three people. Each person will pull a 90 kilogram sledge 280 miles (the equivalent of Portsmouth to Carlisle) across the Arctic in two weeks.

There will be numerous dangers to contend with: The temperatures in April will exceed minus 50 degrees (home freezers work at minus 18 degrees), low enough to freeze the liquid in our eyes. The race will pass through the appropriately named Polar Bear Pass and cross sea-ice spanning the equivalent of three times the width of the English Channel. Survival will be routine. Getting to the pole will be the challenge.

WPA, a medical insurer based in Taunton, has selected four people to train for the challenge out of a workforce of 290. Only three will begin the race. The average age of WPA's team is 26 and none of the team has Arctic experience. The closest any of them have got to cross-country skiing is Tansy Hanson who has been snowboarding in Europe twice. Tansy's sledge will be twice her weight! Each of the team was chosen for their mental robustness rather than experience.

Since November the team has trained every evening and spent weekends hiking on Exmoor. Arctic kit will be issued at the end of February and in March, the team will meet the other competitors in Norway when Polar Challenge prepares teams for the reality of freezing conditions. There, they will get their first experience of the Arctic and will be able to practice and confirm their cold weather drills and racing tactics. There will be further training when the competitors arrive in Canada. The race starts on 6 April 2004.

WPA is supporting the team as a part of its philosophy to invest in its employees so that they will invest in their customers. The team is getting the chance of a lifetime. WPA is committed to the local community of Somerset. The race will help raise much needed funds towards a mini-bus for Taunton Opportunity Group (TOG) and to support Parents and Children Together (PACT). Both are local charities: TOG aids pre-school children with disabilities, and PACT helps under-privileged families with transport and accommodation when their child needs treatment in a specialist hospital away from home.

WPA's Polar Challenge team would like to extend special thanks to:

- Esporta for kindly donating free gym membership and supplying a training schedule
- Taunton Leisure for providing outdoor clothing and equipment at discounted rates
- Calvert Trust for outdoor training
- Adrian Schuler and Martin Wood from WPA for organising and supporting the event

ENDS

If you would like details on how to sponsor the team, please e-mail martin.wood@wpa.org.uk

For more information on the race please visit:

http://www.wpa.org.uk/general/polar_challenge.html

Keywords:

Company News: PR Initiatives, Charitable Giving, Staff Development, Competitions