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Ice festival makes its return to Superior

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The Lake Superior Ice Festival made its icy return to Superior on Jan. 31 and Feb. 1. The event featured a host of activities for families and children of all ages. From food vendors to ice races and snow hills for sledding and climbing, there was no shortage of events.

One of the most notable events was the mascot dance competition. Eight mascots from seven organizations competed to take the crown. In a stunning upset, Blizzy the Ice Festival Bear came from behind to win the honor.

Jodi Saylor, the volunteer events and program coordinator of the city of Superior, spends a majority of the year planning to ensure the event goes smoothly. She coordinates with sponsors, vendors and volunteers behind the scenes.

While the ice festival brings tourists from all over, it means more to the residents of Superior. "The Lake Superior Ice Festival is a joyful reminder of the resilience, creativity, and spirit that makes Superior truly special," Saylor said.

The economic impact on the region is one of the most notable aspects of the event. "The ice festival draws thousands of people to the area. Many attendees dine at local restaurants, stay in local lodging, shop at nearby businesses and return to Superior for future visits," Saylor said.

One of those attendees was Northfield, Minn. resident, Peter Mollison. "I decided to visit my friends who live in Superior and we saw the ice festival was going on," Mollison continued, "I liked seeing the races on the ice and trying local restaurants that I had never heard of before." Mollison plans to visit Superior again in the summer during warmer weather to explore more.

Many of the festivals in the Twin Ports lead to long-lasting family traditions. "There's nothing better than walking around the island hearing laughter, seeing happy faces and knowing the festival created memories for so many people. It's an incredibly rewarding feeling and a reminder of why we put so much heart into this event each year," Saylor said.

Blizzy the Ice Festival Bear performs the crown winning dance during the Mascot Dance Competition on Jan. 31.
Photo by Brendyn Otradovec | Promethean

Ice sculpture of a snowman at Barker's Island on Jan. 31.
Photo by Brendyn Otradovec | Promethean

Ice sculpture of Lake Superior at Barker's Island on Jan. 31.
Photo by Brendyn Otradovec | Promethean

Buzz dances to the beat of "Pump Up the Jam" by Felly and Technotronic during the Mascot Dance Competition on Jan. 31. Buzz placed third with a score of 27 of 30 points.
Photo by Brendyn Otradovec | Promethean

What's human trafficking and what's MMIR mean?

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University of Wisconsin-Superior's Gender Equity Resource Center (GERC) hosted an anti-human trafficking and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR) awareness event in partnership with Desiree Todd who is the Ashland and Bayfield county outreach program coordinator for the Center Against Sexual and Domestic Abuse (CASDA), along with Samantha Rawn who is the anti-human trafficking coordinator for Brightwater Health and Project Reach Out. The awareness and prevention event was held Jan. 29 in the Yellowjacket Union (YU) Atrium in honor of National Human Trafficking Prevention Month.

The stage in the YU was lined with blue and red paper bags filled with tea lights during the presentations. These bags represented the active number of human trafficking and MMIR cases happening in Wisconsin right now. The 66 blue bags, representing the most recent statistic of trafficking cases in 2022, and the 22 red bags representing the total number of cases of MMIR in 2024.

Superior's local response to all these issues is to move towards a public health and prevention framework. This includes a more community-oriented response, which largely includes the Douglas County Human Trafficking Response Team. This response team is a collection of local resources, including places like the District Attorney's office, police department, CASDA, Brightwater Health and the Drug Prevention Coalition Department of Douglas County. The goal and idea of this response team is to provide and share resources for those who need them.

A massive part of awareness is always education, and Rawn dove right in, tackling "What is Human Trafficking?"

"It is the use of force, fraud, or coercion, to make somebody to do some form of labor that they don't want to do," Rawn said. "Two main forms of trafficking that we typically talk about. There is sex trafficking, which is exchanging sexual contact for anything of value or a third party, or trafficker, sets it up. Labor trafficking is just simply any labor or someone who is compelled to do more." Due to the different kinds of circumstances around different types of trafficking, there is lots of misinformation about the topic and what it looks like. Knowing what trafficking can look like is extremely important. "Myths that spread online draw attention away from what trafficking really is, so make sure you are doing just a little research before you repost," Rawn said.

Todd largely works with victimized local Native American populations. MMIR is an epidemic in the United States, even with the close to 5,200 cases open in concern of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Girls and Relatives (MMIWGR),

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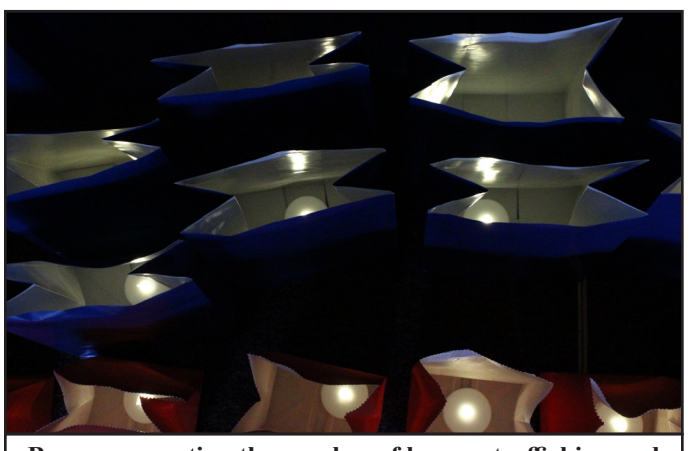
only 1600 are considered active investigations.



Bags representing the number of human trafficking and MMIR cases in Wisconsin at the human trafficking presentatation on Jan. 29.
Photo by Alicia Zoltowski | Promethean

T Wainnman introducing two other speakers for the GERC's Human Trafficking Prevention and Awarness Presentation Jan. 29.
Photo by Emily Tews | Promethean

If you're interested in joining the Promethean, members meet every Tuesday & Thursday at noon in YU 159.
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