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Plunging Into Your Future

BY DR. CLAUDIA SCHRADER

Nothing says January in Brooklyn like the New Year's Day Polar Bear Plunge at Coney Island. This year, I was once again fortunate (or some would say brave) to join hundreds of other New Year's Day Polar Bears and take a plunge for a good cause. There is no fee to plunge, but donations are welcomed because they go towards educational and workforce programming for youth and adults who call Coney Island their home.

I always think about my home in St. Croix, USVI this time of year. Last January, because of the pandemic, I could not spend the new year at home on the islands like I typically do. But, as fate would have it, staying in NYC would allow me to finally check a coveted item off of my bucket list: Coney Island New Year's Polar Bear Plunge.

As you can imagine, last year's crowd was a bit smaller, but this year, as I made my way on to the boardwalk, I saw so

many people on the beach that I thought it was July! It would be my second plunge, and I couldn't help but compare my experiences. The water was bitterly cold, the weather was unseasonably warm and the energy was absolutely incredible. If you want to see a crowd of happy, friendly people, meet me on the Boardwalk next year. I know for sure, after two years of plunging, that this vibe that permeated the air wasn't just because it was New Year's Day. I believe it was because we were all there for a common purpose: to plunge and raise money for great causes.

Making a donation was the easy part for me, it is the plunging in the ocean that is hard. I got cold feet (literally) when I decided to make my way into the ocean. Fortunately for me, there was no shortage of fellow plungers who insisted on holding my hand, walking with me into the ocean, and taking the plunge with me.

In many ways, this sense of



Kingsborough Community College President joined scores of brave New Yorkers on New Year's Day for the annual Coney Island Polar Bear Plunge.

community that I experience at

the Polar Bear Plunge reminds me of Kingsborough Community College and community colleges in general. In addition to providing students with a solid liberal arts foundation, preparing them for the workforce, and transfer to four-year colleges, community college practitioners provide a significant level of support to students throughout their academic journey.

Community college students are often the first in their families to enroll in college, and navigating this terrain can be daunting for them. Many of our students are non-traditional students who, instead of entering college upon graduation from high school, enter the workforce, build their families and then decide to return to school. Community colleges respond to the needs of adult learners by offering flexible schedules, childcare services, and many other supports they need as they juggle and try to balance their personal lives with their educational pursuits. With

a spectrum of workforce development programs, community colleges also serve as a platform for incumbent workers to upgrade their skills, earn new certifications, or learn a new trade.

If you are reading this and hesitant about taking the plunge into college, my advice is that you can start by dipping one toe in (take one class). And when you are ready to move further in (enrolling part time or full time), there will be many people there to help you. Before long, you will be fully in and enjoying the ocean of opportunities that await you.

Dr. Claudia V. Schrader is president of Kingsborough Community College (KCC), a 72-acre academic oasis in beautiful Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn that offers students over 50 academic programs, 100 percent online degrees and affordable two-year degrees for their future. For more information about Kingsborough, visit the website at www.Kingsborough.edu.

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