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Kelly Generator & Equipment, Inc. Plunges into Maryland Special Olympics Fund Raising

OWINGS, MD -- The Maryland Polar Bear Plunge previously had a portable power vendor who supplied generators and other support for the giant Special Olympics fundraiser. But organizers of the event needed more than a vendor, they needed a partner. For that, they turned to Kelly Generator & Equipment Inc. (KG&E).

"It's one thing to stage an outdoor festival," said Nate Garland, Maryland Special Olympics' chief development officer. "It's something else entirely to stage an outdoor festival on the shores of Chesapeake Bay in January."

"The Maryland event, sponsored by the Maryland Highway Patrol each January at Sandy Point State Park on the shores of Chesapeake Bay, is the largest fundraising event of its kind in the world," Garland said. Last January about 9,300 swimmers hit the freezing water in 30-degree weather with wind chills. Another 15,000 better-bundled supporters cheered them on.

And it is a challenge for power suppliers to provide generators, distribution systems, light towers, and tech support required to light and heat a 60,000 square foot main tent, nearby food and entertainment venues, and special beachside hot tubs installed to help warm divers coming out of the freezing water.

"It takes a lot of generators," Garland said. "Previous vendors supplied adequate equipment and technical support for the first 20 years the fundraiser was held, but something was missing," he said.

"My job as chief development officer is to raise money for Special Olympics and to cut expenses as much as possible for the athletes and the program," Garland said.

Previous vendors weren't helping that much because they typically charged the going rate for the services they provided Special Olympics. Then they approached KG&E, meeting with John E. Kelly, Jr., company president, and Garrette Peck, KG&E Salesman for the rental & service division.

Garland and Special Olympian all-star Adam Hays, a staff member at Maryland Special Olympics, met with Kelly and Peck. Hays is a formidable advocate for the organization. He was born with profound brain and spinal damage, but went on to obtain a drivers' license, earn an Eagle Scout award, and receive an associate's degree from a local community college. He runs many of the group's tech operations in between competitive soccer and bicycle events.

"I think they came on board in the first hour we talked with them," Garland said.

KG&E's Garrette Peck said the project was challenging, but well within the company's capacity to deliver. KG&E provided 18 generators, ranging in size from 25 kW to 200 kW, along with spider boxes and other distribution, plus manpower and tech support for the long-weekend event. The company donated a large amount to Maryland Special Olympics, helping to cut Polar Plunge expenses.

Garland said he initially was a bit skeptical about introducing a new power supplier into running a program that relies heavily on shared memories of what worked before.

“But by the end of the week, I thought of these folks as an extension of our team,” he said. “I was blown away by their commitment and professionalism.”

Peck at KG&E also describes the experience as eye-opening.

It is amazing to watch KG&E technicians at work meeting the challenges of hooking up a special event in a short time, working with people many had never met before.

“They are amazing,” Peck said. “They take time to show everyone how things work and what’s going on, and we’re already looking at ways to improve a few things next year.”

However, the event was literally eye-opening in another way for Peck.

“I plunged too,” he said. “The water was fine until I dove in. Then my eyes shot wide open.”