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Barber National Institute announces Lake Erie Odyssey, a new adapted obstacle course event

ERIE, Pa. (April 22, 2026) Barber National Institute today announced the launch of **Lake Erie Odyssey**, a new adapted obstacle course event designed for teens and adults with disabilities, following national recognition of an adapted experience that originated within Barber Beast on the Bay.

The announcement was made outside the entrance to Waldameer Park in Erie, where the event will take place on **Sept. 12**, transforming a portion of the amusement park into an adapted obstacle course experience.

For many years, Barber Beast on the Bay has played a meaningful role in the region. In 2024, however, it was the event's **adapted obstacle course for adults with intellectual disabilities** that drew national attention through a feature in *Sports Destination Management* magazine.

"That recognition caused us to pause and take a closer look at what we had created," said Dr. Maureen Barber-Carey, Barber National Institute executive vice president. "It helped us see the adapted obstacle course not simply as part of a larger event, but as something meaningful and impactful on its own."

Organizers said the recognition affirmed what participants, families and staff already believed: that the adapted course had grown beyond its initial role and held the potential to become something larger, more focused and more intentionally designed.

"That moment of reflection made it clear that continuing as only an adapted component within a larger event was no longer enough," said Patrick Barber, Barber National Institute senior vice president. "We chose to build on its success with renewed focus and commitment, giving it the same level of purpose it had earned."

Planning for the new event was intentionally unhurried, Patrick Barber said, with an emphasis on experience rather than logistics alone. Organizers gathered input from teens, adults and families to help shape an event that feels inclusive, empowering and meaningful.

“Through that process, it became clear this needed to be a community event,” Patrick Barber said. “One that welcomes service providers, partners, families, supporters and advocates from across the region.”

The event’s name was chosen carefully, said Robert Barber, Barber National Institute senior vice president, who officially introduced Lake Erie Odyssey during the announcement. “We took real time with the name, because it matters,” Bob Barber said. “We were looking for something that felt adventurous — something that reflected a journey built around discovery, challenge and pride.”

Lake Erie Odyssey is designed as a choose-your-own-adventure obstacle course experience. Participants will select challenge levels at each station and move at a pace that feels right for them, supported by course buddies, volunteers and spectators. Waldameer Park’s iconic rides will serve as visual landmarks throughout the course.

“Every part of Lake Erie Odyssey is designed around the individual participant,” Bob Barber said. “They are the hero of their own journey.”

The event is supported by community partners, including Palmiero Toyota, the presenting sponsor, and Wabtec, which will underwrite the participation fee for all participants in 2026. “Accessibility was a priority from the beginning,” Patrick Barber said. “With Wabtec’s support, cost will not be a barrier for anyone who wants to participate.”

Additional sponsors include Logistics Plus, Key Bank, the Kyle and Lally Stayer Family, AHN Saint Vincent, and the Erie Sports Commission.

Organizers emphasized that while Lake Erie Odyssey grew out of Barber National Institute’s work, it is intentionally designed as a community-wide event, open to individuals and families beyond those receiving services at Barber National Institute.

The announcement concluded with remarks from a participant and his mother, who shared their experience with the adapted course and the impact it has had on their family.

With Friday’s announcement, organizers confirmed that registration is now open for the 2026 Lake Erie Odyssey. For more information or to register, visit BarberInstitute.org/lakeerieodyssey.