

Empathizing with polar bears

BY BONNIE ADLER

Sam Gault, whose family's business has been delivering heating oil to residents of Westport for five generations, is coming to the people once again. This time, however, it's not to deliver oil, but an important message. The message is first about polar bears, those mammoth 1,200- to 1,400-pound carnivores that live in the Arctic and are now an endangered species, and secondly about our need to take responsibility for the long term and global effects of energy consumption gone wild.

Gault-PBI Polar Bear Empathy Day is coming to the Westport PAL Ice Rink at Longshore on Sunday, Dec. 28 from noon to 2 p.m. to hammer home the message to kids and their parents who, like polar bears, will be out in the cold enjoying the benefits of ice in frigid temperatures.

In between skating and drinking hot chocolate, kids will enjoy a new "energy conservation zone" at the ice rink and have the chance to watch a professional carve a polar bear out of a huge 300-pound block of ice and get to participate in an interactive talk in which they learn about the effects of global warming on our planet.

And, make no mistake about it, kids care about the world they live in, and about seeing to it that polar bears will be around for

generations to come. Sam Gault is counting on them to learn their own lessons about conservation and to remind their parents to change bad habits and cut back on wasteful energy consumption.

Gault said he was mobilized

to act by a story about a little girl in Westport who told her parents that if people would turn down their

thermostats by one degree, we could all save the polar bears. Realizing the importance of energy conservation, he ultimately formed an alliance with Polar Bears International, a not for profit institution dedicated to the worldwide conservation

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 of the polar bear. He intends to harness the goodwill and energy of his well respected and long established family business to help reinforce the message that all energy customers are also part of a larger world which has to recognize the long term adverse effects of excessive energy use.

"I started the alliance in April 2008 to figure out how to make people in Westport and Fairfield County more aware of the plight of these magnificent polar bears, but this effort is also about ways to increase awareness of energy conservation.

"It would seem unusual for an energy company to put its efforts into conserving energy. But we want to see more of our customers conserve energy and use it wisely. We'd rather have more customers who use energy efficiently than fewer customers who use it excessively," said Gault.

There are lots of very simple things home owners can do, like washing laundry with cold water, getting rid of household drafts, switching to energy conserving light bulbs, pulling the plug on energy draining appliances like computers on standby (did you know video games are a huge energy drain?) and toasters and hairdryers which use energy just because they are plugged in.

Of course, there are other, more costly ways to conserve household energy usage by improving insulation, or installing new windows or newer and more efficient systems geared to significantly reduce home heating and cooling costs. To that end, Gault, Inc. has started a new program which will provide homeowners with a "home energy audit" that shows homeowners how they can make significant inroads in reducing their energy costs over time even if they install new energy saving equipment.

Gault recently visited the Arctic to see polar bears in their natural habitat with experts from Polar Bears International. Gault said the experience was profoundly memorable and moving.

"The beauty of the area was astounding, and the sight of these massive animals moving along the ice was unforgettable. Getting a first-hand look at the polar bears in their vast Arctic wilderness gave me a whole new appreciation for the plight of this threatened species. In these tough economic times, when people are making every effort to conserve anyway, we all need to be reminded that our efforts to save money can also have a profoundly positive impact on the environment."

On behalf of Polar Bears International, Gault is proud to spearhead an educational outreach program that has the power to inspire real change in our own backyards."

Polar Bear Empathy Day presentations will be offered from noon to 2 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 28, as well as Jan. 18, and Feb. 15. Skaters are also encouraged to bring gently used coats and blankets for a charity drive that



will be held on each of those occasions. For more information about Polar Bear Empathy Days and other Gault-PBI alliance programs, contact www.gault-pbi.com.



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Sam Gault in the Arctic

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