

Bus route project picks up prize for 'green' teens

by Joan Lownds

Hersam Acorn Newspapers

To three Redding teens, a school bus route is a road map for reducing carbon footprints. "Operation Bus Stop," a project by Barlow juniors Caitlin Taylor and Patrick Murphy, both 16, and Patrick's sister, Fallon, 15, who is home-schooled, recently won first prize in Project Polar Bear's "Green Teen" competition in Fairfield County.

The teens' project aims to reorganize Barlow's bus routes to reduce carbon emissions, inspired after they noticed "a lot of empty seats on the buses," Fallon said.

The three teens received their award on Sunday, March 7, at Westport's P.A.L. Ice Rink. Project Polar Bear is a national competition that rewards students for discovering ways to reduce global warming, and is co-sponsored by the Polar Bears International Alliance and **Gault**, a Westport energy company.

The teens plotted bus routes in Redding and Easton and determined how to eliminate one from the school bus route, which would save an estimated 4,440 to 5,550 pounds of carbon emissions a month, according to their calculations.

"The way the bus service is being used is wasteful and harmful to the environment," Patrick said.

The three plan to submit their findings to the Region 9 school officials. Peggy Sullivan, Region 9's director of finance, said they will take the students' plan into consideration. "We are always looking for ways to improve," Ms. Sullivan said.

The plan won't cause any inconvenience for student bus riders, Fallon said. "Some kids might have to walk an extra five minutes, that's all," she said.

The students decided to enter the competition after reading a notice about it in *The Pilot*, Fallon said.

Caitlin described herself an unlikely candidate for the project. "I was never big on the whole 'go green' movement," she said. "Sure, I recycle my water bottles at lunch and I often try to car pool with my friends." She "had doubts about how big of an impact a single person can make," she added, "but Project Polar Bear opened my eyes. Each seemingly insignificant action of my day significantly impacts the community."

Patrick said he got involved because "basically, I love animals and want to do something with my life that will have a positive effect on them. The Polar Bear Project is one way for me to accomplish this life goal. Of course, anything that we humans can do to preserve our beautiful earth will help animals everywhere in the world."

Jennifer Bebon, a spokesman for Project Polar Bear and Gault, said the competition was launched last August to encourage teens to create "measurable" community projects to reduce carbon footprints.

Ms. Bebon said the contest "started out with 30 teams of teens. That means around 65 kids. Twelve teams completed the project."

"Operation Bus Stop" was a semifinalist among a pool of teams from across the U.S.

and Canada, she said. "There were six teams in the semifinals and four in the finals."

Ms. Bebon said the Redding team did not advance to the national finals, from which a first place team will be chosen to visit the polar bears in Churchill, Manitoba, Canada, in October. But Ms. Bebon said the Redding team showed "great commitment" and praised "their plan to move forward with their project regardless."

Thomas McMorran, Barlow's principal, said Patrick and Caitlin are "great ambassadors for the Joel Barlow's student body. Both are civic-minded students who are interested in making the world a better place. We take pride in our students for thinking 'green.'"

One of the judges for the project was John Horkel, executive director of Earthplace in Westport, a wildlife sanctuary and environmental organization. Mr. Horkel said he was impressed by "Operation Bus Stop" since "it has a lot of merit because of its potential to have a profound impact in the real world. These are extremely dedicated kids and I hope the project grows up," he said.

According to Patrick, the three students will continue to pursue it. "I realized by taking part in this project how just sheer organization can help save our environment. I am looking forward to continuing this pursuit and hopefully convincing our community that it is worth the time and effort it takes to make sure we are not wasteful," he said.





'Operation Bus Stop,' a project by three Redding teens, recently won first prize in Project Polar Bear's "Green Teen" national competition. At Sunday's awards ceremony at Westport's P.A.L. Ice Rink are, from left, Katya Strange, Polar Bear's International's Fairfield County's arctic ambassador; Patrick Murphy, 16, of Redding; Polar Paulie, Bear Empathy team mascot; Fallon Murphy, 15, of Redding; Caitlin Taylor, 16, of Redding; Bridgette Murphy of Redding and Sam Gault, president of Westport-based energy company Gault Inc. —Ted Eyes photo