

Westport oil dealer has empathy for the polar bears

By **ROB VARNON**
Staff writer

There are lots of reasons for Sam Gault, president Westport-based Gault Inc., to save polar bears, the fifth generation oil heat dealer said, but it's mostly for his kids and future generations that he's supporting Polar Bear Empathy Day.

Gault's company has entered into an alliance with Polar Bears International, a non-profit that's trying to save the big white bears from extinction.

Today, at Fairfield's Penfield Beach between 10 a.m. and noon, Gault employees will be on hand passing out brochures with energy conservation tips, facts about polar bears and global warming and information on a program that will send a Fairfield County teen to Manitoba, Canada, to see polar bears in their natural habitat.

The Fairfield Polar Bear Club will also be prowling the beach wearing white jackets to raise awareness about the plight of polar bears. The town's parks and recreation department is also supporting the event.

"We were looking for a way to reposition our company as a conservation company," Gault said Friday, when he stumbled upon a story about a little girl who implored her parents to drop the thermostat one degree in the winter to help save polar bears.

Dropping the thermostat drops the amount of oil or other fuel you burn to stay warm and if enough people do it, the theory is, the amount of carbon released into the atmosphere will be reduced. Pollution has been named as one of the sources for global warming. Gault said that really stuck with him, the idea of each of us doing a little thing to help the world and the bears. A father of two, Gault said he's worried about the kind of world his children and their children will inherit, if people don't work hard now.

The U.S. government designated polar bears as a threatened species this year, but hunters' rights advocacy group Safari Club International is chal-

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lenging that move. SFC specifically is challenging the ban on importing polar bear trophies

from Canada. A trophy is generally a bear that's been stuffed or its skin or other parts that can be mounted or displayed.

Robert Buchanan, president of Polar Bears International, said he respects the SCI's challenge and is glad it is bringing attention to the debate.

Buchanan said he disagrees with the club's argument, however, because ice is melting at a rapid pace in the arctic and without ice, there will not be any bears, so continuing to hunt them doesn't make sense.

The real issue here, Buchanan said, is that the failure to address climate change now endangers more than just bears.

"To think man is not in the crosshairs of extinction is naive," Buchanan said. "To think man cannot get out of it, is also naive."

That's what the alliance with Gault is partly about, Buchanan said, getting people involved locally. He said when you think about it, Gault's involvement is quite extraordinary because if Gault is successful, he will reduce the amount of oil he sells.

But Gault said he feels it's his obligation as an oil heat dealer to find ways to help his customer conserve in the face of high energy costs.

"If the market stays were it is, you're looking at a little under \$5 a gallon," he said of next winter's oil heat prices.

That's almost two bucks higher than last winter, when Gault, whose company has about 6,000 customers in the region, said he delivered less oil because it was warm, but also because it was expensive. He said a lot of people kept the thermostats low.

But don't think Gault is planning to drive himself out of business.

He is rolling out a new

home energy audit service to help people make their homes more energy efficient. The service costs \$250. His company also installs energy efficient furnaces.

As part of the alliance with PBI, a Fairfield teen will be selected to attend PBI Leadership Camp in Canada.

Andrew Eberle, a Yale University student, attended the leadership camp and will be speaking about that experience today at Penfield.

In an e-mail he said, "the thing that was most striking about my ... experience was the unexpected optimism I encountered from the moment I arrived in the subarctic. I came back from Manitoba, as a teenager, with a great feeling of empowerment about what I could do to promote change in my community."

For information on this event and future ones visit, www.gault-pbi.com.

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