

Creating an 'Energy Conservation Zone'

Polar bear plight highlights need for action

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The Gault-Polar Bears International (PBI) Alliance's Polar Bear Empathy Day will take place at Westport's P.A.L. Ice Rink at Longshore on Sunday Jan. 18 to teach children and families about polar bears and the negative impact global warming is having on them.

Polar Bear Empathy Day started last June. It's one of the programs the Gault-PBI Alliance employs to educate people about the plight of the polar bear and things individuals can do to reduce their carbon footprint.

The alliance was formed last spring after Sam Gault, president of energy supplier Gault Inc., heard a story about a little girl asking her parents to turn down the thermostat one degree, which will, as a result, help save polar bears. He then contacted the non-profit organization Polar Bears International.

"Simply put, this alliance is really to create an awareness right here in our backyard..." said Gault.

One way to create awareness is through Polar Bear Empathy Day.

On this day, the ice skating pavilion will be turned into an "energy conservation zone"

with colorful banners displaying tips from the alliance's "Degrees of Comfort" guide, on ways to conserve energy and make your home more energy-efficient.

Some of the activities that will take place during Polar Bear Empathy Day include "chalk talks," which discuss the effects global warming is having on polar bears and the different lifestyle changes individuals can make to help. Kids can also get their picture taken with the alliance's mascot, Polar Paulie, and receive free hot chocolate. There will also be an ice sculptor who will carve a polar bear out of a 300 pound block of ice.

Those who attend the event will receive a free reusable bag containing the alliance's "Degrees of Comfort" guide, mini polar bear posters and a white wristband that reads, "I care about the bear."

Gault said he hopes people who attend Polar Bear Empathy Day will take away many things from the event and "understand all the different things they can do at their home and [their] lifestyle."

"I want people to have an awareness of the polar bear and their struggle," said Gault. "We all need to make changes and take them one step at a time."

Last November, Gault visited Hudson Bay, Canada where he and individuals

from PBI had the opportunity to see polar bears in their natural habitat.

He said seeing polar bears was "quite an experience."

Gault went to Canada at the time of year polar bears gather to wait for sea ice to form and their hunting season to begin. While there, he saw about 800 yards of sea ice form, as well as polar bears playing with each other.

"[They are] beautiful, massive animals," he said. "They're doing good now [but] the trend is, over a long period of time if the ice melts, they won't do as well."

According to PBI's Web site, a major threat to polar bears is the loss of their habitat due to climate change. PBI's Web site also states that the summer ice loss in the Arctic is currently equal to an area the size of Alaska, Texas and the state of Washington combined.

As of May, the U.S. Department of the Interior declared that the polar bear has been listed as a Threatened Species under the Endangered Species Act.

Polar Bear Empathy Day events will take place on Sunday Jan. 18 and Feb. 15 from noon to 2 p.m. at Westport's P.A.L. Ice Rink at Longshore.

There is no charge to attend the events; however, anyone who wishes to ice skate has to pay the regular fee.





Contributed photo

This kit will be distributed during "Polar Bear Empathy Day" at Westport's P.A.L. Ice Rink at Longshore on Jan. 18.

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