

Environmental experience

Polar Bear teaches YMCA campers how to fight global warming

By Emily Pik

Children at the Darien YMCA Camp celebrated Polar Bear Empathy Day with Fallon Murphy, Fairfield County's new teen Arctic Ambassador.

Murphy taught the children about the plight of the polar bears in the fight against global warming. They tried on layers of jackets to feel how the polar bear lives with its fur coat on. The kids also held up their own carbon footprints and learned what it takes to reduce them.

Murphy, who lives in Redding, showed them that just by turning off the faucet while they brush their teeth or unplugging their games when they aren't using them, will help the conservation of energy. She also had them pledge that they would tell people about the polar bear and share what they know about fighting global warming.

"I think it should just be talked about, not politically construed," Murphy said about conserving energy. She is trying to make this change as the newest Arctic Ambassador, following in the footsteps of the previous ambassador, Katya Strage, who will be a senior at Staples High School.

The Arctic Ambassadors program was founded in 2004 by Polar Bears International, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the polar bear's habitat through conservation, research and education. Westport-based Gault, Inc., a home heating oil, propane and cooling company, allied with PBI in 2008 so that the company could reach out to communities like Darien more easily.

Creating the first grassroots

energy conservation movement, Gault led the Arctic Ambassador search for the second consecutive year so that teens like Murphy can communicate with and inspire children to talk to their parents and make a difference.

At 15, Murphy already has a theatrical background — participating in plays and singing at Carnegie Hall — that will help her inspire children to make small changes to conserve energy.

"Fallon can definitely make these events more of a performance and less of a seminar," Megan Smith, director of marketing at Gault, said.

Murphy was always interested in energy conservation, but became involved with the Project Polar Bear "green teen" competition last year, led by Gault-PBI.

She organized a team with her brother, a friend and her mom to reroute the Redding bus route to make it more efficient, and won the competition in Fairfield County. She then decided to apply to be the Fairfield County Arctic Ambassador, and surprised herself by winning that competition as well.

"I never thought I'd make it to even be a finalist," Murphy said.

As an Arctic Ambassador she will attend the PBI-funded Leadership Camp in Churchill, Manitoba, Canada, for a week at the end of September with 30 other teen Arctic Ambassadors from around the world.

While in the Arctic, she will work with leading scientists and photographers to study polar bears in their native habitat, becoming even more informed

about how exactly the polar bear is affected, just as Katya did last year.

"People who have studied the polar bears and what's going on can pass on the correct information," Murphy said about the researchers she will meet at camp.

The idea behind the teen Arctic Ambassador program is to have the older kids influence the younger ones in a positive way.

"I think the kids took something away from it," Suzanne Richards, director of the Y Camp, said. "I heard them afterward talking about how they turn off the water when they brush their teeth."

"For Arctic Ambassadors, we do not dictate too much to them. We need to let them be creative," Jennifer Bebon, a Gault-PBI publicist, said.

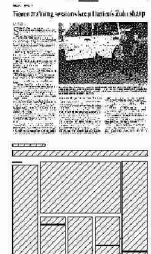
Murphy said she definitely plans on being creative. She would like to expand the performances to not just elementary school children but also to kids of the middle school and high school as well as adults.

"Fallon could take it to another level," Bebon said.

It is very possible that Murphy will be having more Polar Bear Empathy Days and events in Darien at the elementary schools and possibly Middlesex and DHS in her attempt to broaden the program.

"It would definitely be beneficial to elementary school kids," Richards said. "If it was brought to the older kids they might have to redesign the program a little bit."

Children and adults can learn how to reduce their carbon footprints as well as enter



Project Polar Bear, by visiting
www.gault-pbi.com.



Contributed photo

Darien YMCA campers celebrate Polar Bear Emphathy Day on Monday with Fairfield County's Arctic Ambassador.