

Redding students edge Stamford team in Project Polar Bear contest

WESTPORT

Operation Bus Stop, a team of two students from Joel Barlow High School and one home-schooled student in Redding, will advance to the nonprofit Polar Bear International semi-finals as the winner of the inaugural Project Polar Bear "green teen" competition held recently at the Westport P.A.L. ice rink at Longshore.

Gault, Inc., a Westport-based energy company, and the nonprofit organization Polar Bears International recently honored the team at a ceremony at the ice rink.

Four finalist teams will be selected from a pool of national contestants and flown to the San Diego Zoo this spring for an awards ceremony. The team judged "Best Overall" will travel to Manitoba, Canada, in October to study polar bears in their native habitat.

Also honored at the recent ceremony were the members of the runner-up team, Stamford's Westhill High School's Environment Heroes.

As its name implies, Operation Bus Stop's goal was to reorganize Joel Barlow High School's bus routes to reduce carbon emissions.

Environment Heroes' mission was to inspire change at the local government level and plant trees while planting the seeds of democracy.

Referring to her daily bus transportation to and from school and the enormous 4,000-5,000 pounds per gallon of carbon emissions her team calculated her bus produces each month, Caitlin Taylor, 16, of Redding credits Project

Polar Bear for "opening her eyes" to the impact a single person can have on the environment.

"It's not the shoves of society that truly impact our community, but the shrugs of each individual," she said.

Similarly, teammate Fallon Murphy, 15, characterized Project Polar Bear as a life-changing experience.

"This project was not only one of the most positive, embracing experiences of my life, but it was also hard work convincing others. It helped me see that the realities of trying to do good aren't always accepted by others and aren't necessarily fun, but the outcome of trying to do good can be brilliant and character building," she said.

Her brother, Patrick Murphy, 16, came to understand the merits of simple community organization in the race to save the polar bear and help their community reduce its carbon footprint. "Taking part in Project Polar Bear showed me how sheer organization can help save the environment. We observed that the way the bus service was being used was wasteful and thus harmful to the environment. We learned that just spending time re-working what wasn't even being used efficiently could help us achieve our goal."

According to Sam Gault, president of Gault, Inc., today's teenagers represent our best chance for finding energy solutions for a greener tomorrow.

For information on Project Polar Bear and PBI's Arctic Ambassador teen Leadership Camp, visit www.gault-pbi.com.



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