

RALLYING CRY FOR THE POLAR BEAR

Polar bears have new friends in local business community

By KARA O'CONNOR
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WILTON — Thirty campers jumped up, clapping with excitement when a camp counselor dressed up as "Polar Pete" in a life-size Polar Bear costume came to Merwin Meadows Park on Thursday afternoon.

"It all started with a little girl in Fairfield," said Jim Donaher, vice president of Gault Inc. "She told her parents to turn down the thermostat one degree to preserve the Polar Bear's habitat, that started our alliance with Polar Bear International."

Gault, Inc., a Westport-based home heating oil company, and the nonprofit, Polar Bears International (PBI), have teamed up to have their third Polar Bear Empathy Day in Wilton. The event teaches kids about global warming and how to preserve the polar bear's natural habitat.

"There is bad news and good news," said Cynthia Bauman, public relations coordinator for Gault Inc. "The bad news is that global warming is real and whether you believe that it's a natural phenomenon, or caused by humans, the good news is we can do a lot of things to stop it."

This is the first year Gault, Inc., and PBI has had Polar Bear Empathy Day, with the first one occurring in June in Fairfield and the second taking place last month in Westport. According to Donaher, the events have all been very successful, and the kids have loved the experience.

"The great part about this is that kids are really interested in helping polar bears and eventually they will learn that they also can help our environment too," said Donaher. "If you make it fun they will listen."

The day started out with a chalk talk, where the Polar Bear Empathy team shared information about the polar bear's habitat and what the campers and other Wilton residents can do to reverse the

shrinking ice caps. After that, there was a question and answer session with the campers. Lastly, the campers had a chance to take a photo with "Polar Pete," the Polar Bear Empathy Day mascot.

"There are so many things we can change in our lifestyle that every family can help with," said Bauman, standing on a picnic table trying to get all of the campers attention.

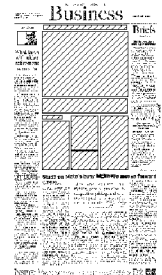
Some of the suggestions that Bauman made to the campers were: Riding a bike instead of driving a car, carpooling, and reusing water bottles. According to Donaher, these are great tips that will really make a difference.

Gault, Inc. is also planning to start "Project Polar Bear," which will send one high school junior to Manitoba, Canada for eight days to research polar bears with scientists. The individual will help develop community projects that will reduce the carbon dioxide load in the atmosphere, according to Donaher.

"It's wonderful that this young generation is so passionate about the environment," said Donaher. "Let's face it, the older generations are lazy and these kids can really teach us a thing or two."

The Polar Bear Empathy Day has increased the awareness of local children about global warming and the environment, Donaher said, which helps rub off on their families. Gault, Inc. and PBI plan to have more Polar Bear Empathy Days in other towns around Fairfield County, she said.

"I think that this technique to teach kids about global warming and the environ-



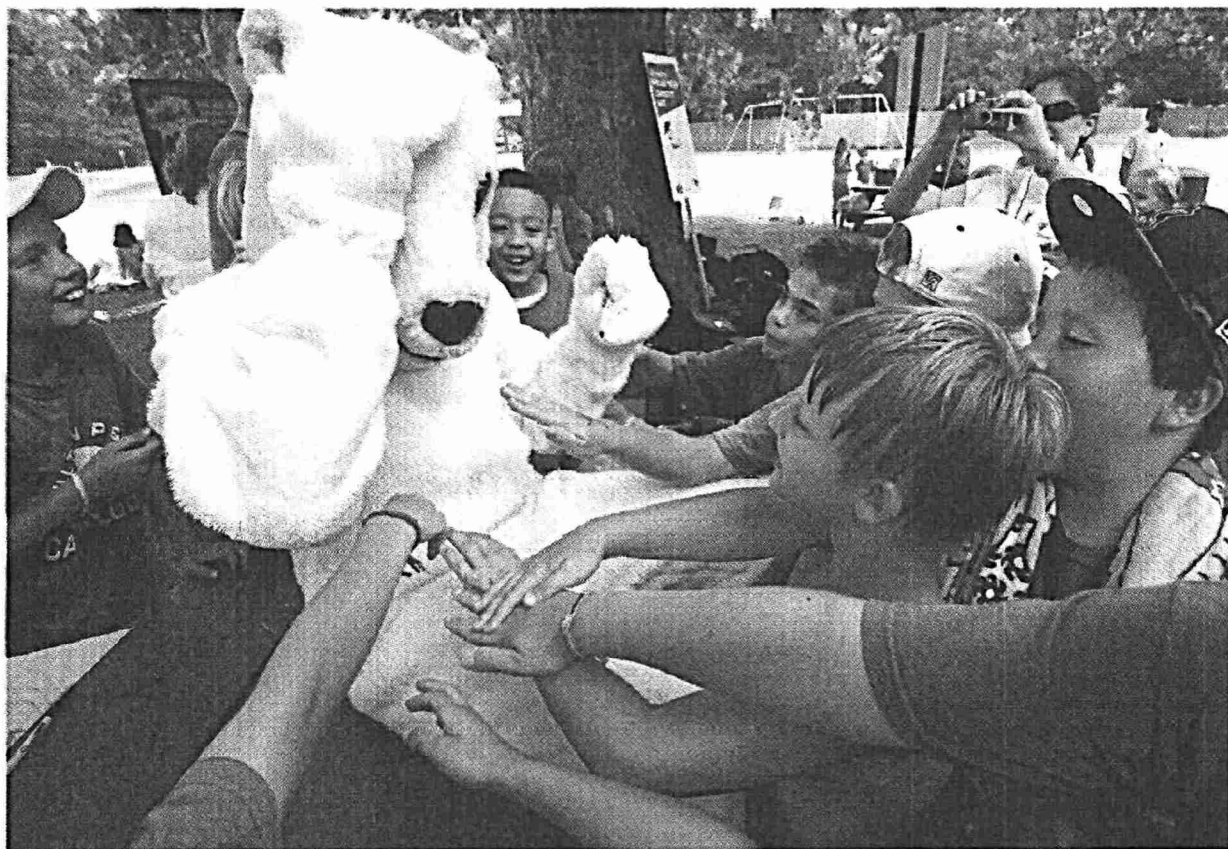


Photo by Alex von Kleydorff

LOCAL CELEBRITY "Polar Pete," the mascot for Polar Bear Empathy Day, autographs some hands at Merwin Meadows in Wilton.

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