

## ABSTRACT

**Title of Entry:** *We are Polar Bear Nation: Under the Northern Lights, He's more than a Mascot.*

**Category:** 48.- Excellence in Special Events, Series of Events

**Institution:** Ohio Northern University

**Entrant's Name:**

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### General description of the entry

Ohio Northern University is one of only four universities in the nation to have the polar bear as a mascot. Fondly dubbed "Klondike," he is a beloved rallying point and symbol of the loyalty and regard that both the current University community and alumni have for Ohio Northern. When the polar bear was added to the endangered species list, many on the Ohio Northern campus felt that it was time to do something, to create a positive response to a critical issue. A committee of students, administrators, faculty, staff and community members organized to create a yearlong series of events and activities to help raise awareness about polar bears and the impact of global climate change on their environment and ours.

### Goals and objectives of the project

#### Goals

- To both educate and raise awareness of the ONU community about global climate change and its impact on the polar bear
- To build a strong sense of community and loyalty among all stakeholders as members and friends of Polar Bear Nation
- To support environmental initiatives on campus, in our community and the world
- To celebrate ONUs loyalty and love of our mascot, the Polar Bear
- To raise money for the designated charity – Polar Bears International

#### Objectives in support of the above goals:

- The student committee created the tagline and worked with the University's Communications and Marketing office to create a logo and graphic elements to "brand" and bring recognition to our program in a consistent way. Items designed and printed:
  - Event calendar, large poster that was placed on an easel at each event, letterhead, posters, postcards and table tents for all the main event speakers;
  - Special save the date and invitations for the Polar Bear Ball; a Christmas card from the President
  - A student built website for Polar Bear Nation
- To bring together all stakeholders to events that also compliment the University's academic programs; and to bring regional alumni back to campus for events and to also engage members of the Ada community.
- To hold a successful kickoff event and to sustain interest and support with continuous events and publicity throughout the year to encourage awareness

### A yearlong series of events

A large University-wide committee was divided into four subcommittees to focus on the four tenets of the goal: Education, Community Building, Environment and Celebration. These subcommittees worked to organize and promote the Polar Bear Nation events. They also organized sales and donation collections at every event.

- In September 2008, Polar Bear Nation publicized its events by using an existing University calendar and redesigning it to introduce the Polar Bear Nation "brand" and to promote its (scheduled at that time) events. These calendars were distributed to all University students, parents, faculty and staff and were given away at alumni and other events throughout the year.

- The Community Building committee created a coloring contest: "Klondike, a Bear of a Different Color" for students in Ada's elementary school (kindergarten through the third grade). One hundred and eleven children submitted entries, all of which portrayed the Polar Bear Nation logo in a unique way. The Committee judged the entries and the artwork of one student from each grade was selected. The winners rode in the 2008 ONU Homecoming parade and their contest-winning entries were displayed in the Ada Public Library.
- The theme at Homecoming was "Come Home to Polar Bear Nation." Polar Bear Nation sponsored a special table at Homecoming to publicize and inform the nearly 6,000 attendees. Calendars and publicity materials were distributed and special Polar Bear Nation pins were sold for the charity.
- Polar Bear Nation "officially" launched Oct. 15 with a lecture by wildlife biologist, Dr. Steven C. Amstrup, who spoke on "Polar Bear – Climate Change Sentinel" to a group of nearly 400. Author of the legislation that placed the polar bear on the government's endangered species list, Dr. Amstrup also spent the day on campus talking to various student groups interested in biology and the environment.
- On Oct. 30 Polar Bear Nation lent its support to a signature campus lecture series (The Keiser Distinguished Lectureship in the Natural Sciences) and helped to promote the presentation by animal behaviorist, Dr. Marc Bekoff. Beckoff and Jane Goodall are co-founders of the Roots & Shoots program. Dr. Bekoff spoke to an audience of over 500.
- Polar Bear Nation sponsored another free lecture by Dr. Lonny Thompson, professor and researcher in paleoclimatology/glaciology from The Byrd Center for Research at The Ohio State University.
- January – Feb. 20, 2009 – ONU's art and design department sponsored a special exhibit, "Environmental Visions" in its Elzay Gallery. The exhibit featured a select group of artists who shared their views about our environment and the challenges we face as stewards of our land, air and water. Invitations to the gallery exhibit were sent to alumni and were publicized to the entire campus and community.
- Jan. 24 – The Polar Bear Ball was held at the Columbus Zoo and drew over 350 students, alumni and faculty/staff for a formal evening that included dancing, food and fun. The Zoo brought baby animals to visit the ball attendees and a Silent Auction raised over \$1,500 for Polar Bears International.
- Feb. 4 – Polar Bear Nation sponsored a "White Out" at the alumni night men's basketball home game. Students were encouraged to wear white t-shirts along with the Pep Band and Polar Bear Nation collected donations and sold towels and pins for its charity.
- Feb. 21 – Polar Bear Day at the Freed Center brought in over 100 community children of all ages to participate in a day of free creative workshops related to the polar bear and the environment and that combined storytelling, art, music and theatre. The children also met with special guest, high school student Elaina Wahl, the Columbus Zoo's Arctic Ambassador who had done a summer internship studying polar bears at Churchill.
- That evening ONU's Symphony Orchestra performed the world premier of Polar Bear Nation's commissioned symphony "Silent Snow" by renowned composer and Emmy award nominee, Joseph Curiale. He was commissioned to compose the symphony in celebration of Polar Bear Nation and as a reflection on the changing climate's impact on the polar bear. Curiale attended the performance and participated in a pre-show discussion. He had been on campus for the week prior, giving lectures and workshops to students.

- In January Columbus area alumni were invited to read *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature and Climate Change* by Elizabeth Kolbert. This was the selected book for Polar Bear Nation and the program called "the campus book project." Alumni were invited to attend a special discussion of the book sponsored by staff at the Columbus Zoo.
- The Campus Book Project  
On March 13, journalist for *The New Yorker* and author, Elizabeth Kolbert came to campus to discuss her award-winning book at the Freed Center. Several months prior to her arrival, the Education Committee met with members of the English department faculty to encourage them to include the book in their winter term curriculum. Our Community Building committee reached out to area book clubs to invite them to read the book in preparation for the author's visit. Ms. Kolbert met with those English classes of professional writing and journalism to discuss the book and careers in the field. Following her lecture, there was a book signing and reception sponsored by the University Library.
- Dr. David Kinder, ONU professor of medicinal pharmacy gave a presentation on March 26 on a topic of his research: "Medicinal and Food plants of the South West: What the Ancestral Puebloans knew about climate change (probably)."
- Polar Bear Nation's year of events closed on April 8 with a signature presentation by National Geographic photographer, Joel Sartore who spoke on "Witness to Warming." Earlier in the day Mr. Sartore met students to discuss photography and careers in photojournalism.

#### **Description of how project fits into overall institutional and or advancement goals**

The mission of Ohio Northern University states that we are a "student centered, service oriented and values-based institution." The Polar Bear Nation program fulfilled every aspect of our mission statement by involving students in events that focused on their education, that built their leadership skills and that involved them and the University in service to the campus and community. It also underlined important values inherent in raising awareness about global climate change and its affect on the environment.

#### **Audience**

Ohio Northern's important stakeholders: students, faculty, staff, alumni, friends and community members.

#### **Total number of professional and support staff who worked on the program**

Fifty students, along with staff from Communications & Marketing, Alumni Relations and the office of Student Affairs comprised the core group. Also participating on single events: the art department, the music department, the University library, and the pharmacy college. A small core group of students who major in public relations facilitated the public and media relations and publicity of the events. We also formed a partnership with the Columbus Zoo who assisted with publicity, participated in the Campus Book project and hosted the Polar Bear Ball at the Zoo. The Office of the President created a Polar Bear Nation Christmas card and also hosted dinner receptions for four of the main speakers that included faculty, staff and students.

#### **Program budget and unit costs**

We solicited and received two gifts/grants to support events and activities: Barnes & Noble (\$5,000) for the Campus Book Project and from Proctor & Gamble (\$1,000) for the Polar Bear Day at the Freed Center workshop activities for community children.

Tickets were sold for the Polar Bear Ball, to help defray costs. The Columbus Zoo donated the location for the ball and faculty, staff, alumni and friends of the University donated the Silent Auction items.

This was truly a collaboratively funded initiative. The Offices of Student Affairs, Advancement, Communications & Marketing, Alumni Affairs, the University's Council on the Arts, and the

music department donated funds from their program or operating budgets to cover expenses associated with specific events. Materials were created and will be used in year two of the program as well.

Promotional items for resale for charity	\$3,000
Posters, postcards, table tents (designed and printed in house)	\$1,000
Purchase of books for the Campus Book Project	\$2050
Commissioning of the symphony	\$7,500
Dr. Amstrup's appearance (honorarium donated to Polar Bears International)	\$1,000
Ms. Kolbert's appearance and expenses	\$16,200
Mr. Sartore's appearance and expenses	\$10,000
The Polar Bear Ball	\$6,700
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$46,450.</b>

### **Special circumstances or challenges faced**

Budgeting was the real challenge as the downturn in the economy adversely affected departmental budgets, but the commitment to the program was very strong and some funds were already committed. Building and sustaining interest and attendance throughout the year for events was the next biggest challenge. We tried very hard to schedule our events so as not to conflict with the many activities on campus. Our student public relations team did media blitzes: social networking, emails and letters to their fellow students, as well as to the community schools and libraries to attract audiences.

Managing the schedule and deadlines for the number of events and activities was a significant challenge. Three key staff members kept student committees on task to meet multiple deadlines, to facilitate implementation and to inspire the students to stay engaged in the process.

The other challenge was to keep events free or at low cost to encourage participation. The grant from Barnes and Noble made Ms. Kolbert's book available to the entire campus. Copies were placed on reserve in the library and community members were offered guest passes to take out the books. Additional books were sold as donations for the charity. Tickets to the Polar Bear Ball were reasonably priced and included student transportation to the event.

### **Documented results, measurements of effectiveness**

Overall, more than 3,000 people attended Polar Bear Nation events. We achieved our goal of attracting significant numbers from all our target audiences. Faculty and students from other nearby colleges and universities also attended lectures. The events in Columbus at the Zoo facilitated the start up of a new Columbus area alumni club.

The Polar Bear Ball was a highly successful social event that brought students, alumni, faculty and staff together to celebrate our mascot

\$4,000 in donations was raised for the designated charity: Polar Bears International

The yearlong series of events accomplished the goal of raising awareness by opening and encouraging platforms of dialogue that included all audiences and specifically inspired dialogue among the campus community -- conversations that continued throughout the year both in and out of the classroom. Students reviewed events and wrote opinion pieces in the student newspaper. Community book groups discussed the issues.

The goals tasked by the four committees were realized: education, community building, awareness of the environment and celebrations showcasing our mascot.