

## THE HISTORY OF THE N.C. ZOO'S

# POLAR BEAR

### Rescue Me!

Wilhelm arrived at the North Carolina Zoo on November 19th 2002. He was among six polar bears confiscated from a Mexico-based circus earlier that month. The circus left the bears and their trainers in Puerto Rico during 2001. The animals were seized by the US Fish and Wildlife service after authorities discovered they were being kept in cramped, dirty, hot conditions.

### Circus Life

Circus life was very hard on Wilhelm. Most of his time was spent in a seven by eight-foot cage. Occasionally, he had access to a shallow swimming pool. Temperatures sometimes soared above 100 degrees, and there was no air conditioning. Wilhelm's diet consisted mostly of apples, carrots, lettuce and bread.

### What happened to the bears?

Of the six bears taken from the circus, Wilhelm came to the North Carolina Zoo. Barle, the only female, was adopted by the Detroit Zoo. Boris and Kenneth found homes at the Point Defiance Zoo in Tacoma Washington. Since being removed from the circus, two of the six have succumbed to deteriorating health conditions believed to have been made worse by years of poor care.

### Where is the bear?

During his years in the circus, Wilhelm didn't have much choice about what to do and when. Now, he can choose to swim, play, sleep or eat. Wilhelm has access to his chilly off-exhibit holding area in case he wants a little privacy. If you don't see Wilhelm, he may be in the back chillin'—we hope you understand why. Keepers balance the need to keep him healthy and happy with the desire for visitors to see this amazing animal.

### Why doesn't he have a companion?

When Wilhelm first came to the Zoo, he was accompanied by Masha, another of the circus bears. Upon their arrival in North Carolina, Masha was discovered to have a number of health issues. Keepers and veterinary staff dramatically improved the quality of his life, but unfortunately, on June 13, 2007, the Zoo lost Masha.

Wilhelm got along with Masha because the two had been together for many years, but polar bears can be somewhat solitary. Wild bears often live alone for extended periods of time. Since Wilhelm is an older male—over twenty years of age—he might not accept another bear in his territory.

