

NWI reaches -19 degrees

Polar vortex movement into Midwest results in freezing temperatures, dangerous conditions

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The Midwest is known to harbor cold winters, however last week saw the most extreme cold temperatures Valpo seen in decades.

Last week, a dip in the polar vortex occurred. A polar vortex, in the most simple of terms, is a large area of cold air that resides above both the north and south poles every day of the year. In the winter, the polar vortex can become less stable, causing it to break into "smaller pods." It was one of these smaller sections that impacted the Midwest last week.

The polar vortex can be compared to a balloon. This balloon of cold air was guided into our area by a large trough and its associated jet stream. According to the American Meteorological Society's definition, a trough is "an elongated area of relatively low atmospheric pressure," while the jet stream is an area of "relatively strong winds concentrated within a narrow stream in the atmosphere." The jet stream acted like a hair dryer, and blew the balloon of cold air (advected it) into our area.

The polar vortex caused a number of cities to reach record low temperatures. In Chicago, temperatures reached -23 degrees Fahrenheit, which is the lowest it has been in 34 years. Rockford, Ill. also broke their record low temperature, hitting a low of -31 degrees Fahrenheit.

In Valpo, the weather bottomed out officially at -19 degrees. These frigid temperatures were exacerbated by



Brendan Miller / The Torch

Northwest Indiana was hit by a polar vortex during the middle of last week. The temperature reached a low of -19 degrees and felt like -47 after the windchill.

moderately strong winds, resulting in a wind chill of -47 degrees on the morning of Jan. 30. At that point, anyone with exposed skin would be in need of medical attention to treat oncoming frostbite within five minutes.

The below freezing temperatures, frigid wind chill and probable frostbite are the main reasons why Valpo was not in session last Wednesday and Thursday.

Frostbite, the main hazard with this type of arctic outbreak, occurs when your skin and the underlying tissue freeze. Frostbite is most common on your extremities, such as your fingers, toes, face (specifically nose and cheeks) and ears.

The first symptoms of the early stages of frostbite are a red tint to the skin as well as an associated feeling of prickling in the exposed area. If not treated, the skin will become pale and numb, eventually turning black as the joints and muscles stop working.

The best way to prevent getting frostbite is to avoid going outside during these cold outbreaks. However, if you must venture out, attempt to cover all exposed skin as well as wear multiple layers of clothing to prevent cold from causing damage.

Though these were abnormal temperatures, even for this time of year, it does not indicate whether or not there

is climate change. The same is true for when we had the record breaking heat wave last summer. These are anomalies, not trends. Weather is short term, while climate is long term. Seasonal and yearly averages are what are looked at in climate change research. This is done specifically to avoid anomalous events, such as dips in the polar vortex. These meteorological averages can be found on the National Weather Service's website, weather.gov.

If you have any further meteorological questions, feel free to reach out to the VUTV Weather Department and watch their new show, Weather With Blake and Heather.

Welcome Project receives endowment

Co-directors Liz Wuerffel and Allison Schuette awarded \$100,000 grant

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Welcome Project co-directors Liz Wuerffel and Allison Schuette received a \$100,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Digital Projects for the Public program to expand their project.

The project is titled Flight Paths: Mapping Our Changing Neighborhoods and will be an interactive documentary. It will include interactive maps, first person stories, interviews, data visualizations and images to aid users in analyzing the factors contributing

to de-urbanization and the fracturing of neighborhoods, communities and regions in post-industrial America.

The stories are told through the lens of Gary and Northwest Indiana. Many of the stories will air weekly on Lakeshore Public Radio each Tuesday and on the Welcome Project Podcast.

"Just a point of clarification, this is not an endowment like a faculty member might be an endowed chair," Wuerffel said. "Rather the National Endowment for the Humanities is a granting institution that funds all sorts of projects. So we are a grant recipient for our project."

"It is a great honor for us and for Valparaiso University to have received back-to-back NEH grants. NEH grants are quite competitive, and so we were thrilled when we found out we are a recipient of this second grant," Wuerffel said.

The NEH is a federal agency that provides grants to support research, education and public programs in the

humanities. Each year researchers from all over the country apply for one of these grants.

"Our Welcome Project Flight Paths initiative is a good fit for their Digital Projects for the Public grant, so several years ago we applied and received the first stage of that grant: a Discovery Grant," Wuerffel said. "That enabled us to put together a multi-institutional team to develop our proposal for an interactive documentary website for our Flight Path initiative."

Last June, they applied for the second stage of the grant, which enables them to develop a prototype for their website.

"This grant, in general, will allow professors Wuerffel and Schuette the opportunity to create an interactive website, working with a team of historians, geographers, documentarians, designers, IT specialists and programmers from a range of different colleges, universities and institutions," said Mark Biermann, provost and executive

vice president for academic affairs.

Wuerffel and Schuette are also working with researchers from IU-PUI, Pacific Lutheran University, Notre Dame, University of Illinois-Champaign and community partners in Gary and across Northwest Indiana, as well as scholars from across the U.S.

Wuerffel described one of the difficulties they encountered while working on the project.

"One interesting note -- because of the government shutdown, funding was not distributed in January," Wuerffel said. "Luckily, we've still been able to work on the project with our team members because we have support of our universities and we know the funding will be distributed at some point."

"It is wonderful to see you the excellent work of professors Schuette and Wuerffel recognized through this grant from the NEH," Biermann said. "This grant speaks to the great work being done at Valpo by our talented faculty."

On the Inside

2. Horoscopes
3. World Banquet
4. Valpo Innovates

5. Artist Spotlight
6. Reviews
7. Opinions
8. Women's Basketball



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