

French Explorer Will Sail to Fight Global Warming

By Han Sang-hee
Staff Reporter

For Maurice Uguen, a French explorer, the world has no time to lose to save the planet from global warming. One of the best ways to fight climate change, he says, is to know what is actually happening to the Earth by exploring it yourself.

The 61-year-old sailing expert and adventurer plans to embark on a five-month voyage from a northeast French coast port in June 2011 on the "Mission Hatteras" project to alert people about climate change and promote the Expo 2012 Yeosu Korea. He was in Seoul Thursday to discuss the finishing touches of the mission.

"Europeans will get to know more about the World Expo through this project, both directly by participating and also indirectly through various channels such as newspapers, magazines and the Internet," Uguen said during an interview with The Korea Times at the headquarters of the Hankook Ilbo, the parent company of the English daily.

The Expo will be held under the theme, "The Living Ocean and Coast," from May 12, 2012 to Aug. 12, 2012. It is designed to provide an opportunity to enhance global perception of the function and value of the ocean and coast, and further share information about the proper use of them.

Uguen, also a documentary producer, writer and photographer, will travel in his aluminum yacht and carry out various programs and research with scientists, researchers, students and journalists along the way. He plans to arrive at Yeosu on Nov. 15, 2011.

One of the most important stops will be close to the North Pole through the Norwest Passage, a sea route through the Arctic Ocean, where the ice is getting thinner everyday due to global warming.

"During the trip, I am aiming to send a message of saving the planet. Day after day, we will study the ice. We will show young people what is happening with it, where it is heading, and also about climate change," he said.

During the mission, Uguen and his crew will post about their journey and research on Web sites such as YouTube and twitter, enabling Internet users from around the world to be informed of the project.

"Different people from different regions with different expertise will get together and participate in various research until we find answers. We need to work with everyone to save the planet. The water temperature is getting higher, quicker than we think. It's not dramatic like in the movies but it is taking place," Uguen said.

The yacht will be built in France, while researchers from the Korea Maritime Institute, Museum Jules Verne and also other French marine institutions will cooperate on and off the boat to find ways to show the world the seriousness of climate change.

Once the boat arrives in Yeosu in November, 2011, it will be ready to accommodate visitors from around the world, just in time for the World Expo.

"At Yeosu, we will open the boat for visitors, allow them to look around, and also show them a special documentary about the journey we made over the past months. Moreover, we will display the research results and hold events," said Uguen.

Citing the importance in educating the young, the sailor shared his ideas of bringing the North Pole closer to them, without having to move out of Korea.

"Now, thanks to technology, the windows are open for anything. There are lots of possibilities. One of my ideas is to bring small GPS beacons and put them on floating icebergs. The GPS would be connected and shown on the computer at a designated school. Now all we have to do is to track and follow the iceberg," he said. "Students can learn so many things from the icebergs — the current, the wind, the temperature and their routes."

"I'm a dreamer. It takes time to save the planet as a team," he said.

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