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Bellaire High School Teacher to Join Texas A&M University Research Team in Antarctica

By John Holder



Ann Linsley

Ann Linsley, a teacher at Bellaire High School in the Houston area, will be taking a very long trip this November.

Linsley will join **Mahlon C. Kennicutt II, Ph.D.**, director of the Sustainable Development Program at Texas A&M and professor of oceanography in the College of Geosciences, and other researchers at McMurdo Station in Antarctica as the Antarctic spring arrives. The educator will assist Dr. Kennicutt's team as they sample and monitor a number of environmental (physical, chemical, and biological) variables near the station and other research sites. The objective of this environmental monitoring is to determine what impact human science and support operations are having on the Antarctic environment, and how to minimize that impact in the future.



Dr. Mahlon Kennicutt

Ms. Linsley is one of 36 U.S. teachers participating, during the International Polar Year (2007-2009), in a National Science Foundation-funded program called **PolarTREC (Teachers and Researchers Exploring and Collaborating in the Arctic and Antarctic)**. The program, which is managed by the Arctic Research Consortium of the U.S., provides an educational research experience working with research teams in the Arctic or Antarctic for K-12 teachers. Participants like Ms. Linsley spend two to six weeks in one of the polar regions,

sharing their experiences with fellow educators, scientists, communities, and hundreds of students worldwide.

The Bellaire High teacher recently got an introduction to her coming Antarctic assignment with an orientation to polar conditions at the opposite end of the planet – near Fairbanks, Alaska! As part of her participation in PolarTREC, Linsley is keeping a journal describing her experiences. On March 24, she experienced the dramatic difference between temperate and polar climates firsthand: “Fairbanks and the PolarTREC orientation have been an excellent introduction to this amazing adventure...I left Houston on the 21st, where it was 85 degrees Fahrenheit, and arrived in Fairbanks where it was -10 degrees... a 95-degree temperature change in seven hours.” **(Click here for more information about Ms. Linsley’s project, and her journal, at the PolarTREC Web site).**

After becoming familiar with polar conditions in the Arctic, Ms. Linsley will travel to the Antarctic in November, as the southern summer is getting underway. Her destination, McMurdo Station, is the largest human community in Antarctica. Ms. Linsley will participate in a long-term monitoring program, developed by Dr. Kennicutt's team, that is designed to describe present and projected environmental impacts in and around the station. The project involves collecting samples from both marine and terrestrial habitats. Geographic Information System (GIS) techniques and geostatistical methods are used to organize the data sets into a coordinated framework, locate them precisely, and track them over time.



Ms. Linsley, who recently completed graduate work in the College of Geosciences at Texas A&M, says, “I could not be more honored or privileged than to participate in this research expedition with Dr. Kennicutt and the rest

of the A&M team. It is a dream of a lifetime to travel to the research areas of Antarctica, and to do so with this team is an immeasurable opportunity.”

Ann Linsley sees her participation as a logical follow-up to previous endeavors she has undertaken with Texas A&M scientists and educators. “I have had the opportunity to work with [professor of geography in the College of Geosciences] **Dr. Sarah Bednarz** for the past 20 years in the area of geography education, and this is the next step to bridging applied research areas with the education community,” she remarks. “As a high school geography teacher, I expose my students to the many opportunities in geosciences and in studying at Texas A&M. My participation in this research expedition is further increasing their interest in becoming better citizens of the planet—even choosing the geosciences as a career option.”

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