

## **Pink Palace educator heading to Antarctica**

*Eilers 'cannot wait to go' on mission to study seals*



PHOTO BY JIM WEBER // [BUY THIS PHOTO](#)

Alex Eilers, manager of the education department at the Pink Palace Museum, has been selected to participate in a seal study in Antarctica. She leaves in January for the world's loneliest continent.

The highs will be in the 30s, with lows in the teens or colder.

It won't be a balmy vacation at the beach, but Alex Eilers, manager of education at the Pink Palace Museum, couldn't be more excited about heading to the Antarctic.

In January, which is during the antarctic summer, Eilers, 44, will join researchers at the McMurdo Station where she will spend six weeks assisting in the study of Weddell seals (not to be confused with the sea lions at the Memphis Zoo).

The trip is through PolarTREC (Teachers and Researchers Exploring and Collaborating), a professional development program for educators which is managed by

the Arctic Research Consortium of the United States and funded by the National Science Foundation.

"I cannot wait to go," Eilers said.

While there, she'll help shave the heads of seals and glue transmitters to their heads. They'll use the devices to learn about an undersea world inaccessible to humans, she said.

"It's literally all work, but it's exciting work," Eilers said.

During the months before her trip, Eilers has been making the rounds sharing information about her upcoming trip, showing off the white rubber double-insulated boots and heavy coat necessary for cold climates.

Her show-and-tell bag also includes a Weddell seal skull and a transmitter like the one that will be attached to the seals.

"I've done about 125 presentations and it's real exciting to see the community latch on to this," she said.

"I've been going to senior centers, to libraries, to schools, universities and talking about the journey," she said.

As part of the educational experience, Mid-Southerners can follow Eilers through her journal/blog, view photographs and receive a postcard mailed by her from Antarctica.

Eilers, grew up in Chillicothe, Ill., earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Mississippi and intended to be a classroom teacher. But while in graduate school at the University of Memphis, she got a part-time job at the museum's planetarium and never left.

"I absolutely love the informal education side of things," she said.

Most of the PolarTREC slots go to teachers, but the non-traditional educators, like Eilers, bring skills that researchers need, said Janet Warbuton, PolarTREC project manager.

The program started in 2004 and Eilers is only the second museum educator.

Her advance legwork throughout Memphis on the Antarctic and Weddell seals was a positive for her with the researchers, Warbuton said.

"Obviously, it benefits the researchers and the PolarTREC program," she said. "It gets the message out there."

The message also benefits the children, Eilers said.

"The students who don't get an opportunity to really see what's out there, this gives them a little glimpse and hopefully that glimpse will cause some wonder and that wonder will cause some inquiry and who knows where that can lead," she said.

-- Linda A. Moore: (901) 529-2702

### **Postcards from Antarctica**

To get a postcard from Antarctica, buy a postage-paid postcard at any U.S. Post Office, address it to whomever you want and Alex Eilers will mail it from Antarctica.

Postcards must be dropped off at the Pink Palace, 3050 Central Ave., by Jan. 1.

For more on Eilers' trip, go to Alex's Antarctic Adventures at [memphismuseums.org](http://memphismuseums.org).

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