

Memphis Pink Palace educator selected to go to Antarctica

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Written by
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MEMPHIS — An educator at the Pink Palace Museum in Memphis has been selected to do research in Antarctica.

Alex Eilers, 44, leaves in January and told *The Commercial Appeal* that she “cannot wait to go” on the six-week trip in which she will help researchers study Weddell seals.

The trip is offered through a professional development program for educators called PolarTREC, Teachers and Researchers Exploring and Collaborating. The program is funded through the National Science Foundation and managed by the Arctic Research Consortium of the United States.

Eilers is the second museum educator selected to participate in the program since it began in 2004, said Janet Warbuton, PolarTREC project manager.

Warbuton said Eilers was chosen in part because of her extensive work with Weddell seals.

Eilers will arrive in Antarctica during the summer when high temperatures reach into the 30s. Her responsibilities at the McMurdo Station will include shaving the heads of seals and gluing on transmitters so that researchers can learn more about the inaccessible undersea world.

“It’s literally all work, but it’s exciting work,” Eilers said.

In the months before leaving, Eilers has shared information with several groups about her trip and what she’ll be doing.

“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.”

Her presentations include a Weddell seal skull and a transmitter similar to the ones she’ll attach on her trip. She also shows the double-insulated boots and heavy coat required for such cold climates.

Eilers intended to become a classroom teacher when she earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Mississippi, but got a job at the museum’s planetarium while in graduate school and decided to stay.

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