

Teacher's scientific exploits benefit students

Nell Herrmann loves a good educational adventure. She has been on scientific missions to study chipmunks in Colorado, climate change in Greenland, sea turtles in Costa Rica, and capybara in Venezuela. Now she is preparing for a month-long scientific mission in Antarctica to study how fossil fuels are affecting organisms in the Southern Ocean.

Herrmann, a Learning Enrichment/Gifted Support Specialist at State College Area High School, is one of only 12 teachers selected nationally to participate in the program, called PolarTREC—short for Teachers and Researchers Exploring and Collaborating.

Herrmann and the other teacher-explorers recently spent a week in Fairbanks, Alaska, learning about their scientific endeavor next February, and how to best use their knowledge in the classroom and community. The project, which is funded by the National Science Foundation and facilitated by ARCUS

(Arctic Research Consortium of the United States), is aimed at improving polar education by partnering K-12 teachers with field researchers.

“I am very honored and excited to be part of this team. It is a great opportunity and I will be able to bring so much knowledge back for my students,” Herrmann said.

As part of the project, Herrmann will be teaching her high school students about the connections between pollution and the resulting impact on the ecology of the world's oceans. Her students will develop their own curriculum, relating to polar science, and teach it to elementary and middle school students.

“It is so much more meaningful to students to have real world applications of science. It helps them make connec-

tions and broadens their understanding of science,” Herrmann said.

After college, Herrmann worked as a wildlife and conservation biologist until she was asked to be a guest speaker at a public school. She says this experience changed her life.

“After spending time in a classroom, I decided to go back to school and become a teacher,” Herrmann added. “It was kind of like an epiphany.”

In Antarctica, Herrmann will be working with a chemical ecologist based out of Palmer Station, on Anvers Island, just off the Antarctic Peninsula. ▀



Nell Herrmann of State College EA.