

Teacher, students take a field trip to Alaska

LINDA REEVES
of the Florida Catholic staff

BOYNTON BEACH | A St. Mark science teacher took students outside the classroom for lessons and a field trip in January, but the group did not go to a beach or to a local park. The class traveled to Alaska.

Teacher Elizabeth Eubanks, who invited two students in seventh grade, three students in eighth grade and two parents to join her in Alaska Jan. 10-26. Eubanks was traveling to the region as part of an initiative by Teachers and Researchers Exploring and Collaborating or "PolarTec," an educational research organization sponsored by the National Science Foundation. The group offers teachers an opportunity to visit polar regions of the world and actually take part in research.

"Most of our team was in Anchorage for about a week at the Alaska Marine Science Symposium," she said. "My students were

by far the youngest at the conference. The rest were professional scientists and grad students. They created and presented a poster on the benefits to students of teacher researcher experiences. We all had a wonderful time and were received extremely well. We spent much of days in the conference and at the poster sessions."

The group also took field trips to the Anchorage Museum and to the Sealife Center in Seward, about three hours south, to get a behind-the-scenes tour.

Eubanks said that she believes the students learned a great deal about the region and the abundant and diverse marine and animal life and the changing eco-system. "They also seriously loved playing in the snow," she added about the Florida youngsters.

The students venturing into the snow and great outdoors included Abby Gibbons, Garrett Guinan, John Colassaco, Shireen Deeb and Anna Severtson. When asked what she learned, Abby, an eighth-grade



Elizabeth Eubanks, far right, a science teacher at St. Mark School in Boynton Beach, gathers with five of her students in Alaska during a field trip in January. (COURTESY PHOTO)

er, said she enjoyed learning that the "people in Alaska survive off of whales" and because of climate change and specifically warm-

ing the "sea ice is melting and the polar bears are starving and aren't getting nutrition or living space."

John also learned a great deal

about climate change and "how Alaska and Florida are being affected by the change in the temperatures in Alaska." ■



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Hands-on learning in Alaska

Boynton science teacher and five students attend science symposium in Anchorage

By JAN ENGOREN
Staff Writer

A science teacher and five of her students from St. Mark Catholic School in Boynton Beach recently returned from a weeklong research expedition to Alaska.

PolarTREC (Teachers and Researchers Exploring and Collaborating), an educational research organization sponsored by the National Science Foundation, brings kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers to the polar regions to par-

ticipate in hands-on field research.

Elizabeth Eubanks, 48, and her students attended the Alaska Marine Science Symposium in Anchorage.

"Having my students present at an international professional science conference is above and beyond any experience that I can offer them as a science teacher," Eubanks said. "The students were thrilled to be there and thrilled to meet real, live, working scientists."

A PolarTREC veteran, Eubanks went to Costa Rica in October and to

the Barrow Arctic Science Consortium in Alaska in 2008.

This time, Eubanks and her students learned about the Arctic ecosystem, the effects of human interaction, climate change, oceanography, lower tropic levels and the impact on marine life, native fish habitats, indigenous Arctic birds and Eubanks' favorite, seabirds and mammals.

At the Alaska SeaLife Center, they learned about polar bear populations, seal migration, the changing ecosystems and Alaska's climate

change.

"The conference was really interesting," said student Anna Hayden, 14, an eighth-grader whose mother, Frances, accompanied the group. "... My favorite thing was visiting the SeaLife aquarium and having a personal behind-the-scenes tour. We saw sea otters and sea lions and learned that polar bears are affected by the sea ice loss and climate change."

One of the scientists at the symposium was George Divoky, an ornithologist with the Friends of Cooper

Island research institute in Seattle who spends up to three months alone on a deserted ice shelf east of Barrow for research purposes.

"I give [the students] age-appropriate information and want to relay an appreciation that as climate changes occur, so will our way of life," Divoky said. "It's important to educate our youth to these changes and how these changes affect different species."

Eubanks is planning another trip with her students to the 2014 Ocean Sciences Meeting in Honolulu.

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