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Port Aransas teachers will go to Arctic Ocean

By Jim Dubois
Reporter



Jill Smith said she feels honored to have been chosen to work alongside scientists in the Arctic Ocean. Smith teaches science at Port Aransas High School. Staff photo by Jim Dubois

Port Aransas Independent School District teachers Andrea Skloss and Jill Smith will embark on an expedition to the Arctic starting in April.

The expedition is part of a program, PolarTREC, that allows K-12 teachers to experience first-hand what it is like to conduct scientific research in some of the most remote locations on earth.

Professor Kenneth Dunton, from the University of Texas Marine Science Institute, will lead the expedition, which includes 15 teachers selected through a nationwide search.

“The selection of two teachers from Port Aransas for the PolarTREC program is significant,” Dunton said. “Jill and Andrea were two of only 15 teachers chosen nation-wide. That is amazing for one small town on the Texas coast.”

Skloss and Smith will have the rare opportunity to work closely with scientists from two to six weeks with a research team and transfer their experience to students of PAISD. This program is a way to improve science education.

“I feel absolutely honored and fortunate to be able to spend time in the Arctic Circle,” Jill Smith said. “I have long wished to be part of an original research project and this is my opportunity.”

Skloss shares Smith’s enthusiasm.

“Being part of a research team, and journaling about the trip is a priceless experience for myself and my students,” Skloss said. “My motivation is multifaceted. One, to fulfill a lifelong dream to work with scientists in the field; two, to develop inquiry based lessons for my students incorporating various arctic dynamics; and three, to hone my skills in the latest data collecting and teaching practices.”

Smith said that in addition to working with scientists, she anticipates getting a glimpse into the culture of the resident native population in Kaktovik.

Dunton was pleased to see that all PAISD was behind the project.

“The support of their principals, the superintendent, the school administration and the PAISD School Board were important criteria in the selection of Jill and Andrea for this program,” Dunton explained. “Both will likely miss some classes in preparation for their field expeditions, but our school administration sees the enormous long-term value of this experience for both these dedicated teachers and the school children. It is very rewarding to have a district with long-term vision for education and the understanding that effective learning can take place outside a classroom.”

Smith said this experience will add a lot to her teaching skills.

“Any and all experience with real-time science can add to the fluency of a science teacher,” she commented. “I will be able to share real stories about real science in an ecosystem that is changing rapidly. Few things are more reliable than first-hand experience. I don’t want my expectations to shadow my experience. I want to be completely open to what unfolds in this adventure.”

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



Andrea Skloss said her future Arctic experience will fulfill a lifelong dream to work with scientists in the field. Skloss teaches science at Brundrett Middle School. Staff photo by Jim Dubois

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