

Dwyer to discuss Polar Gigantism in Antarctic Sea Spiders

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Submitted by SeaDoc Society

Giant-sized sea spiders; under-ice Antarctic scuba diving; while this may sound like the beginning of a chilling winter's tale, it's the focus of this month's Marine Science Lecture Series. Please come to entertain your minds and warm your hearts with local Timothy Dwyer, math and science teacher at Spring Street International School in Friday Harbor. Timothy recently returned from his lifelong dream of traveling to Antarctica, where he joined researchers under the ice at McMurdo Station for nine weeks to study a phenomenon called polar gigantism, in which sea creatures exhibit unusually large body size. In the oxygen-rich polar water of McMurdo, giant sea spiders tower like elephants over the invertebrate-dominated benthic ecosystem.

The talk is free and takes place from 7-8:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 14 at the Emmanuel Episcopal Parish Hall in Eastsound.

Dwyer was selected as one of 15 teachers nationwide to participate in PolarTREC, an educational research experience focused on the Arctic and Antarctic in which K-12 teachers work closely with scientists as a pathway to improving science

education for teachers, students, and the public around the world. Dwyer assisted a team combining talents from the University of Hawaii and University of Montana. During his months integrated with the research team, Dwyer dived under the frozen ocean to collect pycnogonida sea spiders – a volleyball-sized study species for polar gigantism. A leading hypothesis states gigantism may be due to the animals' extremely slow metabolism and the high oxygen concentration of cold polar waters. How the polar gigantism phenomenon will be altered as the Antarctic environment warms due to climate change is a question that has captured the team's attention.

Dwyer has always been fascinated by the diversity of life that exists locally in the Salish Sea and the global ocean that connects the world's ecosystems. Formerly a research staff member at University of Washington's Friday Harbor Laboratories, Dwyer has been a scientific diver for 14 years and science teacher at Spring Street for the past five years.

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