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FEATURED

## Ashtabula native named to exclusive research team

By DAVE DELUCA [ddeluca@starbeacon.com](mailto:ddeluca@starbeacon.com) Jun 9, 2018



Wendi Pillars is shown.

SUBMITTED PHOTO:



An Ashtabula native will soon embark on the adventure of a lifetime, as Wendi Pillars becomes one of only 12 teachers in the country to join an international research team that will study global warming in the Arctic and Antarctica.

The researchers will be studying the effect of climate change and sea ice extent on Arctic seabirds on St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea. The study will be conducted in a remote community of 700 Siberian Yupik natives.

“The research expedition will occur in July and August,” said Pillars. “I was chosen by the PolarTREC program, which is managed by the Arctic Research Consortium of the United States (ARCUS). It’s a consortium of educators and scientists committed to Arctic research that gets funding from the National Science Foundation.”

Pillars was born and raised in Ashtabula and graduated from Harbor High in 1987. She is currently employed as an ‘English as Second Language focusing on science’ teacher in Silver City, North Carolina. She said she was named to the research team based on her ability to communicate ideas and interest in polar research in the classroom.

“For this project researchers were looking for a teacher who would be able to connect their students to the community where the research takes place and whose students would benefit from an opportunity to connect with an Arctic community,” she said. “I’ve been a teacher for 22 years and have taught several years overseas and stateside in military and civilian contexts. I’ve taught all grade levels, mostly with English language learners.”

She said teachers from 12 middle and high schools around the country were named to the team, but some informal educators who work with museums or other outreach programs were included.

“Each member will participate in different expeditions,” she said. “Some will go to Antarctica and some will go to the Arctic. My team of researchers is based at the Institute of Arctic Biology at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and at the National Institute of Polar Research in Tokyo, Japan. Group members hail from all over — from Japan, Russia, France and Alaska.”

She will leave for the Arctic on July 15 and return on August 7.

She said her portion of the research will last three weeks in the village of Savoonga on St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea. She said her group will measure climate change effects on sea ice and Arctic seabirds.

“We will analyze seabird body fluids and collect the small

tracking devices the birds have carried during the past year to gather information on their migration habits,” she said. “The question to be answered is will the retreat of sea ice make it more challenging for Arctic seabirds to find food? Also, will it open up new habitats for birds to use in winter?”

She said she will be required to write her

experiences and research summations and what was learned in a daily journal.

“I’m really looking forward to this

expedition and studying one of the most compelling issues of our time — the effects of global climate change on the environment,” she said.

Tripp Clayton, principal of Jordan-Matthews High School, where Pillars teaches, said Pillars is well respected for her dedication and commitment to her students.

“We are proud to have Ms. Wendi Pillars as a member of the Jordan-Matthews family,” he said, “She is well respected for her dedication and commitment when working with English language learners and the school population as a whole, as well as providing guidance and support to our faculty and staff. We are excited about her selection as a member of the Arctic research team and look forward to hearing about her adventures upon completion of the experience.”

Donna Barger, assistant principal at Jordan-Matthews High School, said Pillars’ passion for teaching was contagious.

“I’m extremely pleased Wendi has been chosen for this research project,” she said. “She is always seeking ways to broaden her horizons and engage the mind. She has taken numerous educator awards and has been invited to speak at many places based on her book “Visual Note Taking for Educators.” She always looks for ways to learn and grow as an educator.”

To learn more about Pillars’ Arctic expedition, go to her link at

<https://www.polartrec.com/expeditions/migration-and-carry-over-effects-in-arctic-seabirds>. Also she can be followed on [Twitter@Wendi322/](https://twitter.com/Wendi322/)

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Dave DeLuca

