

October 17, 2009

Jennifer Kingsley Neighbors: Determined Corning East teacher headed to Antarctica

In less than two weeks Michele Cross will swap the comfort of her classroom for the frigid climate of Antarctica during an educational research trip with PolarTREC.

"I've always been fascinated and intrigued by the natural world around me," said Michele, who will be living her lifelong dream of conducting scientific research when she joins her team in Antarctica on Oct. 29.

Michele will spend seven weeks traveling with scientists as they explore remote areas of the seafloor around McMurdo Station with a recently developed remotely operated vehicle or ROV.

The research team will use the ROV to locate historical experimental structures on the sea floor and investigate the colonization of these structures by species of sessile invertebrates, which live attached to objects and are unable to move, according to the PolarTREC Web site. The ROV is able to take videos and photographs of these ecological communities, which permits the team to identify size, type and species of organisms living on the structures.

Although the special education teacher at Corning East High School will be absent from the classroom, she'll still communicate with her students and offer lessons via PolarTREC's Web site, www.polar trec.com.

But Michele's journey is also a lesson in perseverance for her students.

"I always tell my students to be willing to take healthy risks," Michele said. "I ask, 'What do you have to lose?' If you don't try, you'll always wonder 'what if?'"

The first time she applied for PolarTREC, she didn't get picked.

She made it through two screenings and began to get her hopes up, but ultimately wasn't selected.

"I was devastated," Michele said. "I told them, regardless, I would keep applying until the program didn't run anymore, I got picked or I died."

Michele turned her disappointment into a lesson by encouraging her students to have the confidence to dream big, even if the outcome wasn't what you expected, said her colleague, Beth Bell.

"Her positive attitude paid off," Beth said. "Through her experience, a 'little old' teacher in Corning, as she would say, chosen from so many for such a great feat, they have witnessed the real life reward of believing in yourself, never doubting your abilities and never giving up when things don't go your way."

Michele was given a second chance when another teacher dropped out and she was invited to join the trip.

"I don't know what happened to the teacher they picked," Michele continued, "but they called and asked

if I was interested."

Michele was over the moon about it.

"I can't contain it," Michele said. "I feel like a happy, wiggly Lab ... it's such an honor."

You can follow Michele's journey online at www.polartrec.com/antarctic-undersea-rov-09/journals/michele-cross. If you don't have Internet access, I'll try to include snippets of her journey in this column during the coming weeks.

Additional Facts

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