

# Rob Wilder at work on the Alaskan tundra: Local teacher practices what he preaches

By ED EPPS

Photography By ROB WILDER

(PolarTREC 2007), Courtesy of ARCUS"

When Spartanburg High School Environmental Science teacher and Envirothon coach Rob Wilder settles back into the school routine for 2007-2008, he will likely have a new appreciation for the sticky heat of Spartanburg in August. Wilder spent five weeks of his summer in Barrow, Alaska, where the daily highs hovered around freezing and a constant wind blew at twenty-five miles per hour.



From May 31st through July 7th Wilder worked with Steven Oberbauer, a Professor of Biological Sciences at Florida International University in Miami investigating the role of carbon in arctic tundra ecosystems. The project was part of the PolarTREC initiative, an educational research experience, funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation and managed by the Arctic Research Consortium of the U.S., in which K-12 teachers participate in polar research, working closely with scientists as a pathway to improving science education.



The goal of Dr. Oberbauer's project was to understand how changes in a warming and drying arctic environment may affect the balance and stability of the arctic soil carbon. The team measured soil moisture, permafrost depth, carbon dioxide and

methane gas in the soil and atmosphere, and surveyed plant composition, function and primary productivity. They also used remote sensing as part of a larger project to investigate patterns of change across the tundra at various scales, from small local changes to landscape level changes.

In addition to living in the village of Barrow, Alaska, and working at sites outside



of the village such as the Barrow Environmental Observatory, Wilder also had the opportunity to work on an archaeological project outside of Barrow with Anne Jensen, who has been excavating remains in Nuvuk, the northernmost village in Alaska, in order to learn more about the history of the region over the past 1200 years.

Well known for his hands-on approach to teaching science, Wilder says, "It is exciting to be around science as it is happening." His enthusiasm is apparent in his journal entries written during his five weeks in the Arctic. These range in subject matter from the awe-inspiring beauty of the Arctic environment to the daily nitty-gritty of laborious scientific research and the need for weapons training to be able to protect team members from occasional prowling polar bears.

One of the teacher's most entertaining journal entries is about Joe's Museum, a facility maintained by an employee of PePe's Restaurant in Barrow. "Joe's museum is actually part of his house," Wilder writes, "and includes arti-



facts, stuffed animals, ivory carvings, baleen baskets, which Joe makes himself, and a variety of other odds and ends."

The artifacts are not the only attraction at Joe's Museum, however. "Joe is quite the character and is half the show," Wilder observes. "He loves to answer your questions and also loves a good joke, which he threw into the conversation as often as one would fit. Most of his collection was obtained through beach collection, locals giving him things they find, and through bartering."

Live via Satellite

WOMEN

Draw closer to the heart of God,  
and celebrate His love for you  
in an inspiring day of teaching,  
music, worship and fellowship.

EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN 2007

Beautiful in His Eyes



Saturday, September 22



Kay Arthur



Jennifer Rothschild



Gloria Gaither



Angela Thomas

Musical Guests:



Charles Billingsley



Michael O'Brien

Lake Bowen Baptist Church  
Inman, SC

Saturday, September 22  
9am - 4pm

Buy one ticket at \$25  
get one ticket for \$12.50 (Lunch included)

Call (864) 814-6280 for ticket information.



# 13TH ANNUAL FALL IN THE PARK

**Boiling Springs Community Park**  
Double Bridge Road, Boiling Springs, SC

**Friday**

**October 5th**

**6:30PM - until**

**“ELVIS”**

*Starring Rick Wade*

*Nationally  
Recognized Star  
Spectacular Lights &  
Musical Event*



**Saturday**

**October 6th • 9 am - 4pm**

Food • Crafts • Vendors • Children Activities

**DOG SHOW @ 12 Noon**

Prizes for:

- Best Dressed Dog • Ugliest Dog • Owner and Dog Look-A-Like

**Talent Contest 1 pm**

PRIZES FOR 3 AGE CATEGORIES

Up to 12 Years Old • 13 - 18 Years Old • 19 and Up

1st Place Winner - \$100.00 2nd Place - \$50.00

3rd Place - \$25.00

**CLASSIC CAR SHOW @ 2 pm**



**Space available for  
Craft And Food Vendors:**

Call Wanda Crawley @ 578-8564 or write  
131 Johnson Circle, Inman, SC 29349

Wilder also writes about the naivete of tourists. While the PolarTREC team was at Point Barrow, the northernmost point in the continental United States, “two hummers carrying tourists drove up. The tourists got out, looked around a few minutes and headed back into the warmth of the hummers. They were clearly not prepared for the cold and the wind.....how could you not be?”

Wilder was moved during his sojourn in the North while listening to Kenny Toovak, an 83-year-old elder from Barrow, give the opening prayer in his native language, Inupiaq, at the dedication of the new BASC [Barrow Arctic Science Consortium] facility. “I had no idea what he said,” Wilder relates, “but I was sure he was speaking to the gods.”

Wilder was also impressed by the commitment of his scientific colleagues at the top of the world. “The scientists working in the Arctic are very passionate about their work and are very concerned with getting it right,” he says. “For many of them, it is their life.”

One gets the impression that it is also Wilder’s life. He hopes to make science real for his students as he makes the ongoing research at Barrow a part of his students’ classroom experience. “I have learned a great deal about doing science in the field and hope to spend many more hours with my students gathering and manipulating data that we collect as a class or they collect as part of their own project. I also want to give them a better understanding of what it means to be a scientist and hopefully turn more of them on to science as a possible career choice.”

[Additional information about Rob Wilder’s PolarTREC experience can be found at the official website of the “Climate Change and Tundra Ecosystems in Barrow, Alaska” project: [www.polar-trec.org/arctic-tundra-dynamics](http://www.polar-trec.org/arctic-tundra-dynamics). Mr. Wilder’s Barrow journal can be accessed at [www.polar-trec.org/arctic-tundra-dynamics/journals/rob-wilder](http://www.polar-trec.org/arctic-tundra-dynamics/journals/rob-wilder).]

*Continued from page 17 - Acropolis Restaurant*

the Italian and Greek sections of the menu, don’t worry; classic American favorites, including the club sandwich, and cheeseburger or one of the hot oven subs, like cheese steak and classic Italian sub will certainly do the trick. For those looking for something a little healthier, the salads at Acropolis are waiting!!

Lunch specials are available during the week and include salad and tea for only 6.00, Acropolis is also serving a free glass of wine with the purchase of any dinner entrée, and carry out orders are available at no additional charge and can be placed at 582-2202 or 583-2656. Acropolis is open Mon-Sat from 11-9pm.

Mangiamo!!! (Italian for “Let’s Eat”!!)

## SUDOKU

Solutions to puzzle  
found on page 9

2	4	3	7	6	9	5	1	8
8	7	6	4	5	1	3	9	2
1	5	9	3	8	2	7	6	4
4	1	2	6	3	7	8	5	9
5	6	7	2	9	8	1	4	3
3	9	8	5	1	4	2	7	6
6	8	5	9	7	3	4	2	1
9	2	1	8	4	5	6	3	7
7	3	4	1	2	6	9	8	5