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# Real cool class

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Millsboro Middle School eighth-grade science teacher Michael League, who has been in Antarctica for several months on a research project, waves to his class Wednesday as he begins conducting a class from 9,000 miles away via Skype over the Internet. / THE NEWS JOURNAL/GARY EMEIGH

He warned his students that the computer was very sensitive to sound and there was a slight delay because of the distance.

He even gave his class an assignment -- write down several facts about Antarctica that you didn't know.

League left for Antarctica on Aug. 20 -- well before the start of school -- so he'd never had a live class with this group of students.

LouAnn Hudson, Millsboro Middle's principal, said League hosted an open house for his students and their parents before the trip just so they could all meet ahead of time.

It is not his first trip to an extreme world. As a graduate student at the University of Delaware College of Marine Studies in Lewes, he traveled to Costa Rica for a research cruise that focused on deep sea vents in the Pacific Ocean.

Then he did research with another University of Delaware scientist, Adam Marsh, on a previous Antarctic trip.

He was one of several teachers selected by the National Science Foundation for its program that encourages collaboration between teachers and researchers and includes field trips to polar regions.

League, who is again working with Marsh, is collaborating on research about adaptation of marine worms in Antarctica.

One of the skills he brings to the research team is scuba diving.

Much of the work he is doing in Antarctica



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### ONLINE

To read Mike League's online journal, go to



Millsboro Middle School science teacher Mike League shows the insulated rubber boots he uses to keep his feet warm in Antarctica. / THE NEWS JOURNAL/GARY EMEIGH

applies to the eighth-grade science curriculum, said fellow teacher Colin Crandell, who teaches at Selbyville Middle School.

"I'm teaching ecology right now," Crandell said.

The Delaware example he uses is the horseshoe crab.

Crandell said that League can help children understand that the same concepts apply to species like the penguin.

"He knows my curriculum," he said. "He's an awesome teacher.

Over the past several weeks, League has been keeping an online journal that students and teachers can access.

If they have a question, they can send it to him and have an answer right away.

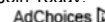
Eighth-graders in the Indian River School District cover four science themes: transfer of energy, ecology, weather and planetary science, said fellow Millsboro teacher Pat McCrea.

Contact Molly Murray at 463-3334 or [mmurray@delawareonline.com](mailto:mmurray@delawareonline.com).

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So far, League has hit on almost all of the topics.

On Wednesday, he explained the clothing to wear in extreme cold. He pulled on a hat, neck covering, parka and goggles -- all of which brought giggles from his class.

Just before that, League had his substitute, Vinnie Colombo, open a PowerPoint slide that showed their teacher shivering in the Antarctic cold beside a fellow researcher dressed for the weather.

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The shivering League was a real-life example of transfer of energy.

The coldest it's been during League's Antarctic stay is 81 degrees below zero.

"But we're not here just to be above ground," he said.

He told his students about the extra gear he wears when he dives, how equipment failure is a serious concern and that when you dive under the ice, you can't forget where the hole in the ice is.

It is so cold that even a four-foot-wide hole in the ice would freeze over in a couple of hours if they didn't cover it with a dive shack, he said.

The water is always 28 degrees and is so clear that even in 100-foot depths the scientists can often see to the bottom, he said.

### Sharing the sights

Then came the moment his students were waiting for: the pictures of weird animals -- a yellow sea star that was as big as League's chest, a 300-year-old sponge, a sea spider the side of a human hand and, on the cute side, a baby seal.

"Seals are incredibly cute but they smell terrible," he said.

He said many of the animals can get very large but they have adapted to grow slowly.

His students had questions: What is your biggest fear?

"Before I started diving, it was the diving, because there is only one way in and one way out," he said. "I've done almost 100 dives now and now it's the fear of being cold outside and getting frostbite," he said.

Another student asked about his favorite color.

Not a silly question at all when it comes to the polar region. With so much white, he said, everyone wears red -- something that can cause issues when there are a dozen red parkas hanging up side

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by side, he said.

Someone else asked about sports.

League said there is an indoor gym where he has been playing basketball and soccer. There also is a climbing wall, he told his students, so he'd been learning to do that, too.

And isn't being gone so long hard?


"Yes," League replied. "I miss seeing my family and my dog -- and I miss being in the classroom, too."

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