

bound for antarctica

L.E. TEACHER PREPARES FOR MONTHLONG JOURNEY
by Ben Berkman

Antarctica, on average, is the coldest place on Earth. And to many, it's the least desirable to visit, let alone to spend significant time. But few are like State High's Nell Herrmann, the South Building's Learning Enrichment teacher, who will spend a month on the southernmost continent studying and collaborating with fellow teachers and scientists.

Herrmann, along with eleven other high school science teachers, was selected to participate in this once in a lifetime experience. "The group that I'll be working with is called PolarTREC [Teachers and Researchers Exploring and Collaborating], and they pair scientists with teachers and they work together," Herrmann explained. Half of the twelve teachers will be sent to the Arctic, while the other half (including Herrmann) will be sent to the Antarctic.

Herrmann spent last February in Alaska preparing for the month she'll spend in Antarctica this coming February. "In Alaska, it was mostly training, safety instruction, and learning how to set up our experiments," Herrmann explained. "In Antarctica, it will be a lot different."

In Antarctica, Herrmann will be working with both scientists and teachers studying how ocean pH and the burning of fossil fuels affects nearby organisms including algae and various wildlife. The change of pH "affects many animals, so we will study various species," she added. "I'm a little nervous about working with scientists who have much more experience in this field than I do, but overall I'm very excited."

Herrmann first became interested in environmental sciences when taking high school biology. "My science teacher, Mr. Williams, was a park ranger and he told us all about exciting environmental issues," she said. "I thought it was cool." Herrmann has followed her interest since, studying the environment all over the globe and teaching students at various levels.

However, for the past two years, Herrmann has headed the Learning Enrichment program for freshmen and sophomores, in which she helps students follow their goals in achieving academic and extracurricular excellence. In a sense, she has created a special community, an escape,



for academically motivated students in such a large school.

“Mrs. Herrmann is the go-to person with questions about practically anything to do with our school. She’s always there to help out with problems, she is full of opportunities for the LE kids, and best of all, she’s very laid-back. Your

LE project can be anything, and as long as you stick with it, she’s completely fine,” said sophomore Akhil Upeneja.

Another sophomore, Susan Moon, added, “I look forward to my LE period everyday. It’s a break

I welcome from the daily grind of school. Mrs. Herrmann supports all her students, and she has created a great atmosphere where we all can

plenty of time for self-reflection in addition to her scientific discoveries. “I want to learn new things, challenge myself, and push myself

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out my comfort zone,” she explains. “Yet at the same time, I enjoy being surrounded by smart people.”

But why would someone really want to spend thirty days in the world’s coldest desert in which

work and enjoy our lunches together.”

But for a month, Herrmann will not be in the comfort of her corner office in the LE room, and spending time in one of the most desolate places in the world will provide

the sun is often not present for days? Said Herrmann, “I just want to go everywhere I can, and see everything possible that this amazing planet has to offer.”



LEFT Ms. Herrmann climbs through an ice sculpture at the World Ice Art Championships in Alaska.

BELOW Ms. Herrmann practices using a satellite phone in Alaska. Herrmann worked in Alaska last February in preparation for the Antarctic.

