Extreme show and tell

A Crystal Lake 4th-grade teacher will have plenty to share after an Antarctica research trip

By Jamie Francisco
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At the beginning of each school year, teacher Betty Trummel asks her 4th graders to open their notebooks and sketch their idea of a scientist.

Invariably, the sketches are the same: drawings of an aging man with crazy hair wearing a white lab coat and grasping a beaker, she said.

"When you ask them to draw, it always looks like a man who looks like Albert Einstein," Trummel said. "It makes me work even harder to dispel that whole myth. I want girls to know that science careers are interesting and fun and exciting. I feel it's a very important part of my job to keep them looking at science as a possibility."

To show as well as teach that science can be exciting, Trummel is headed to Antarctica next month with five educators from the U.S., Italy, Germany and New Zealand as part of an international program called Antarctic Research Immersion for Science Educators, or ARISE.

The program is the educational component of a $30 million multinational Antarctic drilling project, sponsored in part by the federal government's National Science Foundation. In an effort to understand global climate changes, scientists are drilling to retrieve sediment records from the Earth's core.

During her 2 1/2-month excursion, Trummel plans to keep an online journal detailing her adventures, working in conditions where temperatures can drop to 30 degrees below zero, she said.

Trummel, 50, who teaches at Husmann Elementary School in Crystal Lake, visited Antarctica in 1998 for a similar project.

An avid skier, Trummel said she doesn't mind the cold. She spent the summer trying to stay active, including taking a backpacking and hiking trip to Sweden to get in shape for hauling 25 pounds of gear across the ice.

Advances in technology and accessibility to e-mail will allow her to keep in touch with students while she's
gone, she said. She plans to post digital pictures to detail her experience.

Scientists are counting on the efforts of teachers like Trummel to help educate the public about the project and inspire younger students to enter the geological sciences, said Ross Powell, a geology professor at Northern Illinois University and the co-chief U.S. scientist for the project.

"Even in this day and age, it seems as though students do have a classic stereotype of what a scientist is," he said. "We really do need to have women in the sciences. That's especially true in the earth and geological sciences. A lot of women tend to go into the biological side."

Trummel, a mother of six grown children ages 18 to 28, hopes her journey helps students realize the possibilities of a career in science while widening their world view.

There is some evidence her message is being heard in class.

Chase Shepley, 9, was the only girl in the classroom to draw a female scientist during the exercise at the beginning of the year.

"A lot of people think that girls can't do things boys can do, and that's not necessarily true," Chase said. "That's why I draw girls in my pictures. I don't like drawing boys."

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