

PRESS RELEASE:

Antarctic Expedition Invites Children of All Ages to Take Part

Award-winning writer posts two interactive blogs from the ice, one for kids ages 8-12, the other for teens and up.

MOSS LANDING, Calif., April 15/ PR Newswire/ -- In the darkness of Antarctic winter, a team of scientists on a lonely icebreaker will soon explore the mysterious icebergs of the Weddell Sea, with a twist. Children are invited.

Global warming in the Antarctic has recently caused ancient ice shelves to shatter into thousands of free-drifting icebergs that affect the air, the water, and possibly Earth's climate in complex, unknown ways. As the NSF-funded researchers seek answers, writer Nancy Etchemendy will recount each day's events via daily posts at www.icebreakerblog.org. Readers can ask questions and receive answers while the expedition is at sea, May 31 - June 30.

"The initial plan was to write at least one K-12 book about the expedition. I still intend to do that. But books and most websites communicate in only one direction. Scientists and teachers go to Antarctica and talk to students when they return. But while events unfold, kids are out of the loop. Not enough students choose to go into the sciences, so I hope this opportunity to ask questions and get answers in real time will show how cool life as a scientist can be, pardon the pun," says Etchemendy.

The project's two blogs for different age groups are already underway. "Unarctica" combines science fact and adventure fiction for children ages 8-12. "Rime of the Modern Mariner" uses Etchemendy's gothic sensibilities to draw in teens and adults. Both blogs include photos and allow readers to ask questions using a "comments" feature.

"We're thrilled to have a writer of Nancy's stature with us. The science we're doing is cutting edge. Properly presented, the basics can be understood by anyone, but it takes talent to do that well. Nancy has that talent," says oceanographer Kenneth Smith, the expedition's chief investigator.

As the icebergs melt and release dissolved nutrients, they become "hotspots" for ocean life, with thriving communities of seabirds above and a web of phytoplankton, krill, and fish (and possibly marine mammals, though none have been observed yet). The researchers will use

various means -- including remotely operated underwater vehicles, sonar, radar, aerial videography, and sampling devices -- to learn as much as they can about the icebergs themselves, the nearby air and water, and the surrounding "halos" of life, which may be affecting greenhouse gas levels.

According to the National Science Board's *Science and Engineering Indicators 2004*, there is "...a troubling decline in the number of U.S. citizens who are training to become scientists and engineers, whereas the number of jobs requiring science and engineering training continues to grow. These trends threaten the economic welfare and security of our country."

For further details and a press kit, see www.icebreakerblog.org, or contact:

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