Elementary teacher gets a taste of the Arctic

Far from his second-grade classroom, Corvallis man studies seawater, ice flows

BY THERESA HOGUE
STAFF WRITER

CORVALLIS — When Gerhard Behrens looks outside each morning, he’s greeted by a shifting landscape of gray water and the ragged white peaks of icebergs. It is about as far away from his Adams Elementary School classroom as Behrens can get, but right now the world is his classroom.

“The topography is remarkably similar to Death Valley or Northern Arizona,” he said. “Lots of rocks and mountains. There just happens to be an ocean of water here.”

Behrens, a second-grade teacher at Adams, is on board the U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker Healy, surrounded by a crew of university researchers studying seawater and ice flows in the Arctic.

They are in the Nares Strait, between northern Greenland and Ellesmere Island. He got involved in the project through his friendship with the project’s chief scientist, his neighbor, Kelly Falkner.

As a layman, Behrens is responsible for keeping an online journal of the ship’s research projects and adventures, as well as posting photographs and working as an assistant on a variety of projects.

“I have a bit of an adventurer streak in me,” Behrens wrote from his shipboard computer. The Internet is his only connection to the outside world and demonstrations into the existing science courses.

Deciding to spend a month away from his wife and daughters was a difficult decision but Behrens isn’t regretting the decision.

“I’ve learned a lot about oceanography, about doing science, and about life in the Coast Guard service. I’ve also met some interesting, funny, insightful people,” he said. “Top that off with scenery that is right out of a National Geographic Magazine. It’s a darn good way to spend a month.”

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