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Thursday, January 17, 2008

YouthFriend Brings Antarctica to C-1 Students

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Thanks to Hickman Mills C-1 School District YouthFriends volunteer Maurice Smith, students in science class at Ruskin and Hickman Mills High School will explore Antarctica and the effects of global warming. Smith, a self-proclaimed 'computer geek,' is taking a month-long expedition to the Falkland Islands, South Georgia islands and the upper peninsula of Antarctica and in essence, is taking the students with them.

During his 20-day journey, Smith and his wife will use an Iridium Satellite phone, a laptop computer and various state-of-the-art webcasting tools to relay real-time scientific information back to the classroom. Smith leaves from Argentina Jan. 19 on board the Quark Expeditions ship Akademik Shokalskiy, a 48-passenger Russian vessel. The expedition is funded solely by Smith and his wife. "My goal is to motivate and inspire the students to learn about the sciences, technologies and science-related issues that drive our modern world," Smith said.

His trip coincides with the current 2007-2008 International Geopolar Year (IGY), an international collaborative research effort. The last IGY was 50 years ago.

Using data and information collected by Smith, plus internet resources like Google and Google Earth, students from Ruskin, Hickman Mills and two classes in the Cass Co. R-9 School District will compete against each other in what Smith calls a "virtual athletic track meet." Using webcams and a web-based telephone/video conferencing service, the four classes compete 'face-to-face.' "Students at each school will compete to achieve the most knowledge about a major scientific or technology subject," he said. Prizes will be given at the end of the competition.

Smith is a YouthFriends volunteer in the district. Under the program, students are paired with caring adult volunteers in order to enhance their ability to succeed.

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