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SIDEBAR | POLAR-PALOOZA: An International Polar Year Community Outreach Project

By Jackie Richter-Menge

“Palooza” is defined as “an all-out crazy party” or “an exaggerated event.” POLAR-PALOOZA is a state-of-the-art multimedia initiative to teach people about the changing polar regions in a way that is intended to be a little out of the box, and always on the edge. It is one of the interactive learning adventures created by the PASSPORT TO KNOWLEDGE Project (<http://passporttoknowledge.com>) with support from the US National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Here’s how it worked:

THE TRAVELER | Me, joining a team of 40 other researchers and Alaskan residents who took turns traveling to 25 diverse communities across the United States and to Brazil, China, Australia, Norway, and Argentina to share our stories about working and living in the polar regions.

THE EXPERIENCE | Being a part of POLAR-PALOOZA was akin to living the oxymoron “Science Rock Star” a week at a time. After passing muster with the POLAR-PALOOZA Project Director Geoff Haines-Stiles, my first invitation was to participate in the cross-country tour’s stop in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I joined a team of five other travelers—experts on ice, Earth history, seals and penguins, climate change, and subsistence living in Alaska—for three fast-paced days. Coached by Geoff and his partner Erna Akuginow, team members told their stories against a backdrop of eye-popping, ear-blowing cinematography. The high-definition videos featured polar icescapes, wildlife, and us—in native communities and on location at research sites. We broke into teams of two to three to take the “Stories from

a Changing Planet” to local schools, radio stations, the zoo, and the botanic garden. We did hands-on work with K–12 educators during workshops, and participated in a special event for home-schooled students. We presented shows that were open to the public at the New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science. Immediately after these shows, audience members had the opportunity to meet the POLAR-PALOOZA team, take a turn at hands-on activities like trying on polar gear or holding an ice core, and also collect our autographs. (Told you it was like being a rock star!) With the success of my Albuquerque debut came more invitations to join the POLAR-PALOOZA team and have fun sharing my polar adventures with audiences in Washington, DC; Richmond, Virginia; Anchorage and Fairbanks, Alaska; and Perth and Canberra, Australia.

THE LEGACY | POLAR-PALOOZA continues to offer outstanding online resources for educators, students, researchers, and the general public, including video and audio podcasts, blogs, vlogs (video bulletins), animations from NASA, amazing sounds and images of sea, ice, land, animals, and people, and the original music video “Take Aim at Climate Change.”

Check it out!

<http://passporttoknowledge.com/polar-palooza/pp01.php>

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Photos courtesy of Texas A&M University and POLAR-PALOOZA (NSF/NASA/P2K)

