



BELGIAN HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER KOEN MEIRLAEN RETURNING FROM TWO-MONTH STAY IN ANTARCTICA

As the winner of the PolarQuest contest the International Polar Foundation (IPF) organized during the 2010-2011 school year, Belgian teacher Koen Meirlaen is set to arrive back in Belgium on Friday 24 February. A geography teacher at Leiepoort Deinze campus Sint-Hendrik, Koen spent two months at Belgium's "zero emission" Princess Elisabeth Antarctica (PEA) research station getting to know more about the scientific research being conducted there and the systems that make PEA the first research station in Antarctica designed and built to run entirely on renewable energy.

Gathering information to use in the AHA! awareness-raising project that he and his students put together, Koen has been able to show to students in Belgium that they, too, can be agents of change.

Science in Antarctica

First and foremost, PEA is a scientific research platform. Koen accompanied scientists during their field work in order to learn more about the various kinds of research going in Antarctica and why this research is important. As a teacher, he was able to communicate complex scientific matters in a language that students could understand and relate to.

Living in a "zero emission" prototype

By talking with engineers in the station's technical team, Koen was able to learn how the station's various systems integrate to enable PEA to be the first "zero emission" research station in Antarctica.

During his two-month stay, Koen became a member of the IPF Antarctic Operations team, taking part in logistical operations and everyday work at the station. Like any member of the crew, he was able to experience firsthand what it feels like to adapt your behaviour to an environment where energy supply is limited.

Producing educational material

Through small movies, photos and interviews published on his blog, Koen communicated his findings during the season. He also organized several Skype conferences to offer students the unique opportunity to compare the results of small experiments they carried out at school with the data he had collected in Antarctica. In addition, other PEA team members participated in these conferences and answered questions from students. Talking "live" with someone in Antarctica had a strong impact on students and teachers alike!

In the coming months, the IPF and Koen will collaborate in creating pedagogical dossiers, videos and pictures. These resources will be made available on EducaPoles, the educational website of the IPF (www.educapoles.org). By offering free educational material in three languages (French, Dutch and English), we hope this local project will have a global reach.

Interviews

Koen Meirlaen will land in Brussels International Airport in Zaventem on Friday 24 February at 11:05 am. You can arrange an interview by getting in touch with Isabelle Du Four:

Mobile: 0478/900 192

Email: isabelle.dufour@polarfoundation.org

Background Information

The International Polar Foundation is a public utility foundation, which aims to promote polar research as a tool for raising public awareness and fostering understanding of the fundamental mechanics of our climate.

The IPF also encourages the adoption of innovative solutions that will enable us to respond to the challenges associated with climate change in a sustainable manner.

The IPF is the mandated Antarctic Operator for the Belgian Polar Secretariat.

For more news and information about the BELARE expedition, the Princess Elisabeth Station, or the International Polar Foundation, please visit the following websites:

www.antarcticstation.org

www.polarfoundation.org

Additional information about the AHA project can be found on www.ahaproject.be