



News Release

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Polar Explorer Tells Century: the Ice Is Melting

Polar explorer Eric Larsen of Grand Marais, the third American to ski to both the North and South Poles, told Century College audiences on Thursday, Sept. 3, that the only way to slow down the melting of the polar ice is to think big and start small.

“When I was at my lowest emotional point during my expedition to the North Pole, when conditions were border-line insane, I finally realized something,” Larsen, 38, told students during an afternoon presentation. “I needed to stop worrying about getting to the North Pole. I just needed to take one step. That philosophy has helped with a lot of issues and problems. One action can have a big effect if you add it to other actions. No one of us is as strong as all of us.”

Larsen, who was part of the first team to travel to the North Pole during the summer months of 2006, showed stunning photos and video of his trips to both the North and South Poles. The photos depict the

trips' hardships, beauty, routines and occasional silly moments. "I want to give you an impression of how magnificent, wild and pristine these areas are," said Larsen. "And how much they are changing."

Larsen said the top five of the warmest years on record all have occurred in the last decade due to the burning of fossil fuels and increased carbon emissions that are holding in the heat and altering the atmosphere. As a result, scientists predict that the Arctic Ocean will be ice-free in 10 to 15 years. Polar bears that live on the sea ice are among the first animals to suffer.

During his trip to the North Pole, Larsen and his partner were amazed at the amount of open water. Conditions were extremely dangerous as they traversed thin ice and clambered over huge ice chunks wearing skis and dragging their canoes. It took over two hours to travel a quarter mile.

Finally reaching the North Pole took 62 days. "It was my life's biggest moment of anticlimax," said Larsen. "There was no land marker. After arranging to get picked up, we just put up our tent and went to sleep."

In a development he called "surreal," Larsen later appeared on the Tonight Show with Jay Leno to talk about his historic accomplishment.

Larsen said traveling to the South Pole in 2009 was somewhat easier. "It took persistence and hard work to complete that trip," he said. "It is the windiest, coldest and driest place on the planet." Visibility was so limited during white-outs that he got sea sick. Traveling with your eyes shut is the same as having your eyes open, he said.

"What got us through was teamwork," said Larsen. "I've discovered that a person's personality plus his communication skills, cooperative nature and problem solving skills are more important to being a successful explorer than physical skills."

Larsen described himself as an all-around average person who judges the quality of his life according to how many nights he can spend in a tent. He plans to travel to the South Pole again in November 2009, to the North Pole in March 2010 and to Mount Everest in September/October 2010.

“The North Pole, South Pole and Mount Everest are the last frozen places on earth,” he said. “We are all explorers. Our job is not to conquer these places, but to protect them.”

Before and after Larsen’s talk, area community leaders gathered to talk about local energy solutions such as Mahtomedi’s Zephyr Wind Project.

Larsen’s appearance was made possible by the Mahtomedi Area Green Initiative, Century College, Clean Energy Resource Teams of the Metro Area, ISD 832 Community Education, St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church Environmental Stewardship Team, White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church’s Global Climate Crisis Committee and the Alliance for Sustainability.