



News Release

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[Nancy Livingston](#)
Public Relations
651-779-3222
Fax 651-779-3470

[Century College](#)
3300 Century Avenue North
White Bear Lake, MN 55110

Century College 10th Annual Young Women's Conference Attracts 180 Girls

Ann Bancroft, America's foremost female explorer, told the Century College Young Women's Conference participants on Saturday, March 20, that she overcame obstacles such as dyslexia and shyness to travel to both the top of the world and the bottom of the world.

"School was really hard for me and I loved the outdoors," Bancroft told the 180 girls at the conference. After graduating from college, Bancroft became an elementary school teacher at Clara Barton Open School in Minneapolis. Then her life changed dramatically when she got an opportunity to go to the North Pole with seven men and 49 male dogs in 1986. "It was a dream come true," she said.

Bancroft said her expedition spent 57 days on the frozen ocean with the sled dogs pulling all their belongings. When two members of the expedition were flown out with injuries, the media figured Bancroft would be one of them. But she persisted. "The best way to change minds," said Bancroft, "is to

continue to follow your heart. Don't listen to people who doubt you. Find people who believe in you and hang on to those people."

After her North Pole experience, Bancroft was eager to travel to Antarctica. In 1992, she had that opportunity. This time, all of the members of the expedition were women. As they traveled across Antarctica, they sent regular blogs and video clips to 350,000 students, including groups of 5th graders in St. Paul.

The difficulty of that trip cannot be overstated, Bancroft said. The women traveled over bumpy, craggy ice in freezing, windy conditions. "Nobody believed that women could or should pull sleds to the South Pole," said Bancroft. "Our biggest obstacle was not the 100-mile-per-hour winds or the polar bears. Our biggest challenge was that negative attitude."

Several years later, Bancroft returned to Antarctica with explorer Liv Arneson of Norway. The two women skied 2,400 miles this time, pulling the sleds themselves. "The greatest danger was our remoteness," said Bancroft. "If we were sick or injured, it would be a long way to get out."

To make better time, the women worked up a sail that sometimes helped pull them along. However, they had tremendous problems with lack of wind because they were there during the calmest summer on record. "Pulling the sleds ourselves was not pretty work," she said. She said the atmosphere was so dry, the sled runners created friction that slowed progress.

"We did get depressed," said Bancroft. "We saw our dream slipping away."

Just when they were wondering if they would be able to complete their journey, the wind picked up and they sailed for 15 hours straight – 77 miles. "That changed everything," she said. "We felt lucky and happy to be there."

Bancroft said she and a group of international women will go on their next expedition to Antarctica next year in November 2011. "Fifty million kids will go with us via the Internet," she said.

At the Young Women's Conference, 180 girls in grades 6 to 10 attended 30 different conference sessions to explore various career opportunities. The 61 adults who accompanied them attended three workshops.

The Century College presenters included Bob LaFavor, Carrie Hageman, Chris Caulkins, Dick Kotasek, Ervin Hairston, Holly Borrelli, Jeff Jahnke, Jill Aitchison, John Adie, Katie Pierre, Katie Voss, Kim Loomis, Nickyia Cogshell, Rick Nelson, Roberta Cullen, Sheree Vincent, Sue Dickens, Todd Fink and Wendy Zhao.

The conference also received support from Century dental students, facilities workers, community presenters, Key's restaurant and Subway. Federal dollars from the Perkins Grant and the ETS/TRIO program funded the event.



Photo: Ann Bancroft at podium