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## MV science teacher spends 19 days aboard NOAA ship surveying fish

By **PAIGE COLLINS**  
Staff Writer

While most of us were shooting fireworks or watching them on television at home, Mount Vernon High School science teacher Anne Mortimer was on the Gulf of Alaska watching silhouettes of humpback whales in the sunset.

“It was a gorgeous firework show of our own — Alaska style,” she said.

Mortimer assisted researchers for 19 days aboard the Oscar Dyson as they surveyed walleye pollock as part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Teacher at Sea program.

Walleye pollock is a \$1

billion fishery annually. The white fish are used for imitation crab meat and fast-food fish sticks and burgers.

Mortimer heard about the program through a friend and applied to NOAA in October. Liz McMahon, deputy director of the Teacher at Sea program, said about 250 applications come in each year, and only 30 to 35 teachers are selected.

“There’s actually research that shows teachers who are exposed to hands-on research experience become better teachers,” McMahon said.

The scientists had an important job, Mortimer said — estimating how many of the fish were in Alaskan waters. That estimate is

important for both the economy and the ecosystem, she said.

Equipment broke on the trip, and the research was delayed several times. Mortimer said it was interesting to see how the scientists handled it.

“In real research, that’s what happens,” she said. “Nothing is perfect. Nothing works 100 percent as it is supposed to.”

Next school year, Mortimer will teach biology and physical science, a freshmen course. She said in the first few days she will give a presentation about her trip, with the hope of exposing her students to possible maritime careers.

Not everyone on the ship

was a scientist. Other career paths that could put you on a research vessel include deck hand and captain.

“Without all of the other people, there’s no way that research could happen,” she said.

McMahon, the program director, said the teachers who return from a research experience are able to offer more insight into what they are teaching.

“We encourage them to transfer their knowledge not just to their students but to their colleagues as well,” she said.

The program accepts applications for teachers from kindergarten through college. The majority are from middle and high



Photo courtesy of **Anne Mortimer**

**Mount Vernon High School science teacher Anne Mortimer** holds a Pacific Ocean perch on her Teacher at Sea trip to the Gulf of Alaska.

schools, McMahon said. The program is not restricted to science teachers. The organization reserves a couple of spots for educators from aquariums and museums, she said.

The teachers are fully sponsored by NOAA,

including airfare, room and board, and food.

“I would encourage teachers to apply for it,” Mortimer said. “It was a worthwhile experience to see research happening first-hand and to see what it takes to make that research happen.”

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