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Eric Larsen is among the few who have visited the North and South poles and climbed Mt. Everest.

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Upstate Forever event to feature arctic explorer

BY CHARLES SOWELL | STAFF

OVERCOMING THE THINGS that dwarf human strength and ingenuity are the biggest part of what keeps drawing Eric Larsen back to places like both poles and the top of the world.

"The thing that surprises people the most about the Antarctic is the sheer size of the place - the emptiness of it," Larsen said from his home near Boulder Colo., after completing his second trip to Antarctica.

Antarctica has a permanent population of zero and at any given time between 1,000 and 5,000 people man scientific stations scattered across 5.4 million square miles.

It is the fifth largest continent behind Asia, Africa, North and South America. Antarctica is also the coldest, driest and windiest continent with the highest average elevation. Most of the land is covered in a permanent ice cap that's a mile thick.

"There is just so much distance involved and the conditions are so harsh that you have to be ready both mentally and physically," he said of making a 750-mile ski to the South Pole while pulling a sled.

No dogs.

The 40-year-old Midwesterner has been visiting the remaining wild places of our planet for 20 years starting as a rafting and backcountry backpacking guide and working his way up through the levels of difficulty to Arctic and Antarctic explorer and climber of Mt. Everest.

Larsen walked in to both poles and climbed Everest during one incredible 365-day period. He is the only person to do that in a year. He is the only American on an exclusive list of 15 people who have visited all three poles - Everest being considered the planet's third pole because of the harsh conditions and altitude.

He'll go anywhere to talk about lands of ice and snow and the devastating changes he's seen caused by climate change. Larsen will be the keynote speaker at Upstate Forever's Forever Green Annual Awards Luncheon.

"I'm coming because they asked me to," Larsen said. "I think it's important to tell people about what's happening in places like the poles and Himalayas. The great swaths of open water that used to be covered in ice in the Arctic; the rapidly retreating glaciers on the highest mountains on the planet; and the massive changes caused >

> by warmer oceans that are nibbling away at the Antarctic ice cap along the coast."

Larsen, who is engaged to a Colorado woman, led three women on a short sprint to the South Pole during his last visit to Antarctica in December.


"We only did about 50 miles," he said. "But it was a real challenge for them - a Guatemalan, Frenchwoman and a New Zealander. Most tourists spend their time on a cruise ship that skirts the coast with quick zodiac (an inflatable boat) to

shore."

During this trip (made in the 24-hour light of the Antarctic summer) the highs were between five and 25 degrees below zero, he said.

"It's a grind on a trip like that. Doing the same thing day after day with an endless white horizon as your scenery. The starkness of the place has its own beauty but you have to remember that it can kill you."

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Thursday, Feb. 2 from 11:30 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. at the Embassy Suites, 670 Verdae Boulevard. Individual tickets are \$50. For more information contact August Darnell at (864) 232-2302 or august@crawfordstrategy.com.

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