

Capturing Climate Science at its Core

Julie Palais '78 honored as CEPS Distinguished Alum

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JULIE PALAIS '78 WAS HONORED AS THE 2019 CEPS DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD RECIPIENT DURING A CEREMONY HELD SEPT. 27. SHE RECEIVED THE AWARD FROM CHUCK ZERCHER, DEAN OF CEPS, AND MURIEL ROBINETTE, MEMBER OF THE CEPS ALUMNI SOCIETY.

When Julie Palais '78 completed an assignment in the final days of her undergraduate career at UNH, she had no idea it was the seed that would sprout an award-winning career as a polar glaciologist at the National Science Foundation.

But that assignment, a proposed research visit to the Athabasca Glacier in Canada that came to fruition, would only be the first trip to dozens of glaciers in Antarctica in her effort to help forge the United States as a leader in glaciology research.

For those efforts, Palais was named the 2019 College of Engineering and Physical Sciences Distinguished Alumni Award recipient. The CEPS Alumni Society gives the award annually in recognition of outstanding contributions to society with an emphasis placed on enhancing the image of UNH.

"Julie's service at the National Science Foundation has positioned her as a leader of the glaciology scientific community," says Chuck Zercher, dean of CEPS. "Her impact on the science and on the profession has been impressive, and we are proud of her UNH roots."

Palais accepted the award from Zercher and former recipient and CEPS Alumni Society representative Muriel Robinette '74 during a ceremony held Sept. 27. During the event, \$750,000 in scholarships were awarded to more than 200 students in the college.

"I never imagined that I would be honored not once, but twice by my alma mater," says Palais, a Massachusetts native who was also awarded an honorary degree from UNH in May. "I am truly grateful, and I hope that my experiences will encourage others to dream big and recognize how well they are being prepared by their professors, their courses and their lives at UNH."

Palais has a long list of accomplishments, awards and recognitions that include two geological features in Antarctica bearing her name -- Palais Glacier and Palais Bluff. She's most proud of playing a role in the development of the U.S. ice core community that analyzes ice cores for the evidence of climate change. Early in her career, there were only a few labs and a lack of groups that could properly collect, analyze and sample ice cores. As program manager of the Glaciology program at NSF, Palais was responsible to help build the infrastructure and personnel in the United States.

"The U.S. science community is at the top when it comes to the ability to plan and execute cutting-edge ice coring programs and to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about how climate is changing," says Palais.

Palais completed her Ph.D. in geology at the Ohio State University. She then spent two years working as a volcanologist while completing a post-doctorate program at the Graduate School of Oceanography at the University of Rhode Island. Palais then became a visiting scientist at the NSF that began what was a 26-plus year career with the agency. It also allowed her to meet her husband, Rick Stevens.

"While my Earth science courses no doubt helped prepare me for a career in science, the electives I took at UNH helped to make me a well-rounded person who was able to enjoy many different facets of life," says Palais.

Upon retiring from her position at the NSF in 2016, Palais earned a master's degree in anthrozoology from Canisius College in 2019. She is working part time as a consultant at the Animal Welfare Institute in Washington, DC and plans to utilize her expertise to make positive change through her travels. In an upcoming visit to Nepal, also known as the "Third Pole," Palais will visit an institute in Kathmandu focused on climate change in addition to learning how she can help address the street dog issue in the region.

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