



▶ EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT:
JOURNEYMAN FORECASTERS,
DON VAN DYKE.....2

○ ISSUE 3 | ○ SUMMER | ○ 2013



▶ LEARN ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH EMERGENCY MANAGERS3



▶ CLIMATE RECAP FOR SPRING AND OUTLOOK FOR THE UPCOMING SUMMER AND HURRICANE SEASON4

Tallahassee topics

NEWS AND NOTES FROM YOUR LOCAL NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE OFFICE.

The National Weather Service (NWS) office in Tallahassee, FL provides weather, hydrologic, and climate forecasts and warnings for Southeast Alabama, Southwest & South Central Georgia, the Florida Panhandle and Big Bend, and the adjacent Gulf of Mexico coastal waters. Our primary mission is the protection of life and property and the enhancement of the local economy.

The Role of Student Volunteers at NWS Tallahassee

By Ron Block, Ryan Walsh & Emily Heller

The NWS Tallahassee office has a multi-faceted mission focused around the protection of life and property. One of the lesser publicized duties is the preparation of the next generation of weather forecasters. This office is unique in being one of the few co-located with a meteorology department at a university. This provides a plethora of highly intelligent and motivated students willing to volunteer their services. Most volunteers are upper level undergraduate or graduate students who work 10 to 15 hours a week. As they gain more confidence and proficiency, they are given increasingly more complex training and responsibilities thus aiding the staff in the completion of their duties. Volunteers are especially valuable during tropical, severe weather and flood events when, in addition to assisting with product preparation, they interact with the public, media and emergency managers by receiving and disseminating timely and accurate weather information needed to facilitate warning decision making. Some students also work on research projects. (More information on student research projects can be found in the [Winter issue of Tallahassee Topics](#)).

According to volunteer Ryan Walsh, “The program has offered me the unique chance to learn and develop as a forecaster. I have gained invaluable

experience on all facets of the forecast program which cannot be learned in a typical classroom setting. This has placed me in a favorable position to bid on the highly competitive NWS Meteorologist Intern jobs”. Emily Heller added that “besides the hands-on forecasting experience, I was able to observe and participate in a range of non-operational responsibilities. This includes interacting with many in our user community through public outreach and office tours as well as with emergency managers, spotters and law enforcement officials during severe weather events.” Tiffany Hersey noted that, “being a great forecaster takes practice and the volunteer program provides a level of experience on all aspects of forecasting unavailable anywhere else. The forecasters serve as a valuable resource needed to achieve our professional goals.” The ultimate payoff for these students is the transference of this valuable experience to their resumes, giving them a competitive edge upon graduation for selection to positions both within and outside the NWS. Tiffany was recently selected to be the Deputy Meteorologist for the State of Florida. These volunteer positions are much coveted positions with stiff competition as this office generally selects no more than a few volunteers during any semester. Interested students should contact this office to learn about available opportunities.

NWS Tallahassee Fields Bowling Teams

By Mark Wool



The NWS Tallahassee office fielded two bowling teams this past spring season at the Crenshaw Lanes on the FSU campus. *The Bolts* (at left) consisted of team captain and senior forecaster, Mark Wool (far right), ET Ron Eimiller, OPL Jim Bolden (2nd from right), intern Katie Moore (2nd from left) and her boyfriend Brian Nguyen (far left). Student volunteer, Emily Heller, was a regular sub for the team, as was Mark’s friend, Brian O’Conner, program director at Hot 104.9. *The Twisters* consisted of team captain and ESA, Doug Sherrick; journeyman forecaster Tim Barry, Tim’s wife, Julie, and son, Tim, Jr, and FSU meteorology academic program specialist Tim McGann. The teams finished in the last two positions in the final standings as they did not compete in the fall 2012 half of the season. However, both teams became more competitive as the season progressed. Fun was had by all and several of the teams’ members signed up for the summer league, which runs from May 14-July 30. In fact, we now have a NWS presence on 3 of the 10 teams competing this summer. Wish us luck!



Employee Spotlight

*Radar, Storm Data, and Local Modeling
Focal Point*

By Katherine Moore & Don Van Dyke



Q: Did your interest in weather start at a young age?

A: It sure did. I've been interested in weather for as long as I can remember. I remember being scared of lightning as a little kid, and then my house got hit by a tornado when I was 8 years old and the roof almost came off. I can't say that those things specifically caused my interest in weather though. It may have just been one of those things that I was born with.

Q: When you were at school at UNC Asheville, did you go straight into the meteorology major, or did you hop around a little? What brought you to FSU for grad school?

A: I went straight into the major. I never really wavered at any point in my life on what I wanted to do for a career, going all the way back to elementary school. There was one point at UNC Asheville where I considered double majoring in mathematics as well, but my primary interest has been and always will be weather. I came to FSU for grad school primarily because of the co-location with the National Weather Service office. I knew that the NWS was where I wanted to end up, and I figured that FSU would provide the perfect opportunity to volunteer at the office while getting a Master's Degree.

Q: How did you get your start with the National Weather Service?

A: I started volunteering at the Tallahassee office while I was a graduate student during the Fall semester of 2008. In March of 2009, I got a call that I had been selected to be an intern at the Melbourne, FL office, which was one of the best days of my life. I give a great deal of credit to Irv Watson, the former Science and Operations Officer of the Tallahassee office, for allowing me to volunteer and helping me get the job with the wonderful staff at Melbourne. Without him giving me that chance, it is unlikely that I would be where I am today in my career working with the great group of people here at Tallahassee.

Q: What is your favorite part of the job?

A: My favorite part of the job is definitely working the radar during a severe weather or flash flood event and making the warning decisions. The office performs many important functions, but none are more important than issuing accurate and timely severe thunderstorm, tornado, and flash flood warnings to the public. This can also be the most challenging part of the job for a variety of reasons, but it is also the most rewarding part of the job because hopefully we are making a positive difference to the people out there.

Q: Can you turn off the job when you walk out of the building?

A: Haha, absolutely not. Weather is an integral part of my life whether or not I am at work. I am just very fortunate to have a job that is also my hobby. I have two computers at home filled with a variety of weather software, and I have the capability to run a high resolution WRF model on my laptop computer and carry it around with me. My computers at home are constantly downloading and processing weather forecast data and creating graphics that are uploaded to a personal website that I have filled with forecast data.

Q: What do you like to do for fun?

A: I like to hang out with my friends, many of whom are also meteorologists. I am also a huge Star Trek fan and own over 100 Star Trek novels and a Starfleet uniform. Outside of weather and Star Trek, one good friend has recently gotten me interested in hockey. I also like to keep up with college football.

Q: Where do you see yourself in 5 to 10 years?

A: By that time, I hope to be a lead forecaster either here at the Tallahassee office or at another office somewhere in the southeast U.S. I can't see myself ever leaving operations at any point in my career, so I will probably retire as a lead forecaster a few decades down the road.



Recent Staffing & Office Changes

By Ron Block and Katie Moore

In April, we welcomed Toan Tran, our new Information Technology Officer (ITO). Toan, a University of Florida graduate, began his NWS career in 2002 at Dodge City, KS, before moving to Sacramento, CA, and then on to Brownsville, TX for four years.

NWS Tallahassee shares a building with the FSU Dept. of Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Sciences. To better familiarize students and faculty with our facilities and resources, and to enhance NWS-FSU interaction, forecaster Alex Lamers developed a weekly office weather briefing program. The initial briefing occurred in May with subsequent briefings tentatively scheduled to occur each Monday morning. A NWS forecaster will present a weather discussion using the office's situation awareness displays. Guests are invited to comment and provide feedback. Hopefully this program will serve to encourage more students to participate in NWS programs and opportunities.

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Social Media



And Online



weather.gov/tae

The Role of the Public Information Officer in Severe Weather Operations

By Donal Harrigan & Ron Block

The primary mission of the NWS is the protection of life and property, a priority most evident when severe weather threatens. Recently, this office conducted a thorough analysis and overhaul of our Severe Weather Operations Plan (SWOP). One of the highlights was the creation of a Public Information Officer (PIO) who is the direct link between the general public and the radar operators. Aside from fielding phone calls, the PIO closely monitors social media. Our office is especially active on both Facebook and Twitter, which are very useful in monitoring for reports of storm damage or severe weather and adds a useful avenue to provide information from the NWS directly to the public.

Several reasons highlight the importance of receiving severe weather sightings and damage reports, both in real time and post-event. First and foremost, real time reports serve as the only true verification that severe weather is occurring. These assist the radar operator in making critical warning decisions. The weather evolves rapidly and sometimes it is unclear whether the threat displayed on radar is actually occurring at the surface. Real time ground-truth can confirm this.

The PIO is also tasked with rapidly determining the reliability of reports based on such factors as a detailed analysis of the storm and its environment, on-going reports and their general experience. Social media provides yet another pathway to rapidly alert the media, public and officials on the expected impact of any storm. Even after the storm passes, severe weather reports can verify the accuracy of the warnings. Ultimately these reports provide the critical input needed to keep people safe and informed.

There are multiple ways to report severe weather: telephone, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter and our Webpage. Regardless of the method, our office in Tallahassee is always eager to receive user input and feedback both during and after an event. The PIO allows us the ability to interact with the public, which is critical in severe weather decision making and just one of the ways we have modernized our SWOP. Some other important aspects of the SWOP include ensuring adequate staff is available and a more efficient workload distribution during the event.



This Quarter's Focus:

The NWS-Emergency Management Partnership

The NWS Tallahassee Perspective: by Kelly Godsey

The success of the primary mission of the NWS, namely saving lives and property during weather events, depends not only on timely issuance of non-routine products, but on ensuring that they are disseminated to our users in a clear and timely manner. This involves establishing and maintaining relationships with all 48 counties served by NWS Tallahassee, each staffed by an Emergency Manager (EM). EMs serve as the primary liaison between the county and the NWS, so establishing a close relationship is essential to fulfilling our mission. This relationship is facilitated by the Warning and Coordination Meteorologist, Jeff Evans, and his assistant, Kelly Godsey.

Preparedness before hazardous weather threatens is key. The NWS partners with the EM staff in storm spotter training, hurricane presentations, regional interactive severe weather exercises and outreach activities to prepare each county to respond to a specific or multiple hazard events and educate the public about weather hazards. As hazardous weather threats increase, forecasters develop briefing packets designed to specifically identify timing and severity of impact for use by the EM community and first responders. When a significant threat is anticipated, live webinars are provided allowing instant interaction between forecasters at NWS Tallahassee and EMs across our area of responsibility. During the events, the NWS looks to EMs to provide critical feedback for warning decisions and storm damage reports. After the threat has ended, the NWS depends on EMs to spotlight areas of damage and assist on post-event surveys.

The Emergency Management Perspective: by Ashley Tye, Lowndes County, Georgia EM (pictured above)

Emergency management is founded on building and maintaining relationships. The job of emergency managers (EMs) is to support local government and non-government agencies, volunteer groups and the public by providing timely and accurate information and appropriate resource support whenever emergency situations arise. We are able to accomplish this through the relationships we build every day. Because the majority of large scale responses in Lowndes County are weather related, our relationship with the local weather forecast office in Tallahassee is critical to our local EM program. It is rare for an entire week to pass that we do not have some interaction with a staff member at the Tallahassee NWS.

They assist us in many ways before, during and after adverse weather events (see above) and their contributions greatly increase our preparedness efforts and improve the accuracy and efficiency of the information provided to the public. Recently, we have worked closely with the Tallahassee NWS to revise flood levels for one river location in Valdosta and establish flood services for another location. The end result is improved services for the citizens of Lowndes County. This is just one example of the many ways we rely on NWS staff to accomplish our mission every day.

Diversity & Outreach Efforts

By Ron Block & Kelly Godsey

The office remains active in both Diversity/EEO and outreach activities. In March, the Diversity/EEO team published the second *Tallahassee Topics* newsletter and hosted its second in-office heritage themed meal and meeting. The day began with a St Patrick's Day feast where the staff and guests enjoyed many Irish dishes. The meeting celebrated Women's History month with a roundtable discussion on "Women Making Great Strides in Science". This was led by professors from the meteorology, physics, and computer science/IT departments who discussed their unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities for women in the STEM fields. During the second half of the meeting, the team led a discussion on cooperation in the workplace with an emphasis on do's and don'ts in local office interactions.



There were also overviews on religious discrimination, on managing work and life while working non-traditional hours, and on communicating in a multi-generational workforce. The next meeting will be held on June 11th and will highlight LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) Pride month, preceded by a Middle Eastern themed meal in observance of Jewish Heritage Month.

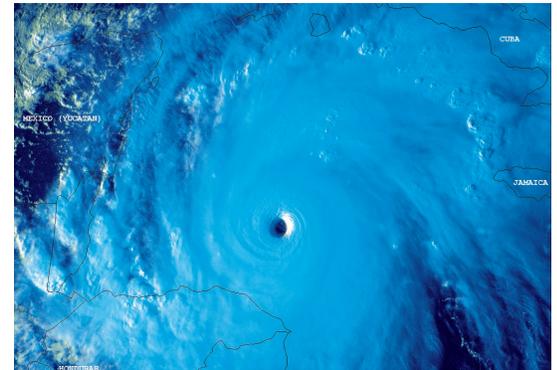
In March, the office collaborated with Tallahassee Community College and the Florida Department of Emergency Management to conduct a tabletop exercise that simulated a tornado event in Tallahassee area. In April, Jeff Evans, Ron Block (center), Katie Moore, student volunteers Emily Heller (center) and Michael Navarro, and members of the local AMS-NWA chapter (including Max Tsaparis and Nikki Perrini (at left), staffed a booth (pictured at left) that focused on weather safety at the Springtime Tallahassee festival, the areas largest annual event attended by more than 100,000 people. In April, Ron participated in the multi-cultural Peace In the Park Festival which highlighted the contributions of various government and private agencies and Mark Wool and Alex Lamers worked a booth at the Apalachicola Boat Show, giving mariners information about our coastal waters forecasts. The Tallahassee Community College

science classes conducted their semester visit to the office. Ron and Tim Barry oriented them to careers in the NWS and to the many tools used by the staff to prepare forecasts and warnings. Megan Fournier, daughter of Jeff Fournier served as a "guest meteorologist" during the Bring Your Daughter to Work Day. In May, Tim and Jim Bolden represented the office at the 4H Ecology Day celebrations.

Climate Recap for Spring

By Tim Barry

The climate for Tallahassee during the March to May spring period saw temperatures that were below normal. This period was highlighted by our fifth coldest March on record, and the coldest month since January 2012. The maximum temperature recorded at the Tallahassee Airport was 95 degrees on May 20th and 23rd and the lowest was 27 degrees on March 4th, one of six days at or below the freezing mark. In addition to the record breaking cold March, a few other records were tied or broken. The minimum temperature of 44 degrees on May 14th and 51 degrees on May 15th broke and tied respectively, record lows for those dates. While April is on average our driest month, it was slightly wetter than March and the only month that saw above normal rainfall this spring. May was very dry with only 0.43 inches at the airport, making it the 4th driest May on record. Rainfall for the three month period measured 9.18 inches or 3.29 inches below normal.



Climate Outlook for Summer

By Tim Barry

The Climatic Prediction Center for this summer (June through August) calls for an enhanced chance for above normal temperatures and slightly above normal rainfall. For Tallahassee, the average summer temperature is 81.4 degrees and average rainfall 22.25 inches. On average, almost 40% of annual rainfall occurs during the summer, which is Tallahassee's convective season. The hurricane season commences June 1st and runs through the end of November. The official NOAA outlook calls for a likely chance (70%) for an active hurricane season with 13 to 20 named storms of which 7 to 10 could become hurricanes, including 3 to 6 major hurricanes (Category 3-5 or 5 or winds of 111 mph or higher). There are three overlapping climate factors that are expected to contribute to this active season: a strong west African monsoon, warmer than normal sea surface temperatures, and a lack of El Nino, which would suppress hurricane formation. The first tropical storm or hurricane that develops this year will be called Arlene. For the other names of the 2013 Atlantic hurricane season please refer to the list at right.

2013 Atlantic Tropical Storm Names

Andrea	Humberto	Olga
Barry	Ingrid	Pablo
Chantal	Jerry	Rebekah
Dorian	Karen	Sebastien
Erin	Lorenzo	Tanya
Fernand	Melissa	Van
Gabrielle	Nestor	Wendy