

Q & A for NHC



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When I walk into your work area, it is obvious you really enjoy your job.

It's something I really enjoy coming in to do. I've always been passionate about weather since I was about six or seven years old.

That's a running theme here at NHC. Was there something that triggered the interest?

The biggest thing was my involvement in the 4-H program for 10 years. I grew up in mostly rural Indiana, and it has a solid farmland and agriculture program through the Purdue University Extension Service. I was at my Aunt and Uncle's farm every summer where they had animals and I learned how to take care of them. The 4-H program also had a weather project. I did that from age eight through 12 and the project ended up going to the Indiana State Fair every August. Part of fulfilling the project was visiting the National Weather Service office at Baer Field in Fort Wayne at the time and that was pretty exciting.

That must have made an impression.

I remember specifically one of the requirements of the weather project was to compile a month's worth of temperature and precipitation data for display on the project poster. So, one Saturday, a trip was planned to go to the weather office and dig through the data. The airport was always an exciting place to visit and I remember seeing the old WSR-74C radar and all of the equipment they had, thinking "Wow, this is cool!" There was a file cabinet with all of the printouts, and I sifted through it all to get the data I needed. Also one Christmas before starting high school, my Aunt and Uncle gave me a unique gift. It was a professional desk or office door nameplate that said "Meteorologist" on it. And that set the course for me with a strong emphasis on math and science classes through high school.

Where did you end up attending college?

I looked into Purdue, since it was relatively close to home and I was familiar with it through the 4-H program. I was brought up through private schools, so I also looked into what Valparaiso University had to offer. After examining both, I fell in love with Valparaiso. It was just the right size and their meteorology program was just getting ready to add an expanded weather center and classroom laboratory at the time. While it was a bit more expensive to attend Valparaiso, I felt the professors would be more attentive to the needs of supplying me the best education possible going forward into my career. My four years at Valparaiso University was definitely worth it without a doubt.

So, you have your degree. Now what?

The summer after graduation I went on a storm chase sponsored by the university. I had previously participated as a sophomore for class credits, but as a graduated senior you take on more of a leadership role and are expected to lead the sophomore class. The chase occurred anywhere from South Dakota to Kansas to portions of Texas. We covered a lot of ground in the 10 days chasing, driving wherever the storms were forecast to initiate. I was designated the navigator for the trip, plotting where to go and having a safe road network to escape with if a problem arose.

But that's not a job.

No, it's not. When I got back from the chase trip, my Mom told me I needed to search for a job. I had experience as a paid intern my senior year at WGN-TV9 in Chicago for (meteorologist) Tom Skilling. It was a great experience, although I did not have my heart set on broadcast meteorology. I did apply for a NWS job in Key West, but never heard anything back on it. So, I applied to several places in the private sector. After a few weeks, I got a call from Ocean Routes in Sunnyvale, California. Now called WeatherNews, it was primarily a global ship routing company. Everything was set up to fly out there for the interview, and then 9/11 happened. So, I offered to drive out for the interview. They agreed, paid the expenses and, after the interview, offered the job to me.

Not where you thought you'd be?

California was the last place I thought I would go upon graduation, but it worked out. I was there for a year and a half, and started getting antsy about the expense of living in California. The current job position had run its course, leaving me to wonder if there was something else out there, now that I had gained some valuable experience. Weath-

erNews was planning to start an aviation forecasting office in Norman, Oklahoma and at the last minute, I decided to go. I knew it would be good opportunity.

How so?

It was something different and exciting, and I would be half way closer to family. Also with the aviation job, it involved forecasting for American Airlines. Part of my marine meteorology experience that I obtained in California played over into the aviation side, because American has a big presence in flights to the Caribbean and South America, so I was able to maintain a tropical marine forecast aspect that I really enjoyed. I was there for almost five years.

And the leap to NHC?

I had always wanted to work for the NWS, so I began applying to as many weather service intern slots that I could. I had the education and enough operational experience now. Sure enough one day I got a call from Chris Burr of NHC's Tropical Analysis and Forecast Branch (TAFB) regarding an intern position there. He gave me a report date, and I made the move to South Florida. I have now lived in three of the most influential states for natural disasters: California for earthquakes, Oklahoma for tornadoes and Florida for hurricanes.

With the experience in both California and Oklahoma, what do you find to be the most challenging in TAFB?

At WeatherNews, you would use a lot of free and widely available NWS models and products to create risk-mitigation driven products. Having that background coming here, now I am creating some of those guidance products and influencing the information contained in them and that's a lot more challenging.

There are some exciting changes coming with the marine forecast grids.

Yes, and some of my experience with WeatherNews is that they were already massaging model data, editing grids, and packaging it up for various clients. We are implementing that here in TAFB with the Graphical Forecast Editor (GFE) for our marine areas of responsibility. So we'll be able to package it up for public and private sector use, which will be more beneficial for both entities as the best possible marine forecasts will easily be at their fingertips.

How do you handle shift work and not think about weather 24/7?

Well, I am getting married later this year, and have recently purchased a house. So, this is certainly a big year for my future spouse and I. These are big steps, with certainly a lot of added responsibility, but between the wedding plans and fixing up the house I'm sure I will stay plenty busy over the next year or so.

Your past history has you getting antsy after a few years. Where do you see yourself in five to 10 years?

I see myself providing marine forecasts in TAFB and continuing to be a strong support during the tropical cyclone season to the Hurricane Specialists Unit as well as to the overall NHC mission. I like the variety of tasks that each desk performs in TAFB. There

are a lot of new potential products and services that TAFB is coming into that feeds on my previous experience that I will be comfortable with right away. Plenty of training lies ahead, and continued involvement in focal point duties within TAFB will allow me to enjoy the support role that I have, helping out wherever I can, and be a part of the greater NHC team.

Send comments to: nhc.publicaffairs@noaa.gov