



Q & A with NWS Raleigh Meteorologist Mike Strickler



Mike Strickler

Position: Lead Meteorologist

Education: North Carolina State University

Hometown: Richmond, VA

Where did you go to school and what was your NWS Career Path to get to NWS Raleigh?

I began my college career at the University of Oklahoma and quickly realized how far away I was from my family and high school girlfriend who stayed in my hometown of Richmond, VA to attend college. Consequently, I left OU and attended school as a physics major at Longwood College (now University) in Farmville, VA. That field of study allowed me to complete most of the General Education requirements for a transfer into the meteorology program at North Carolina State University a couple of years later. The unique co-location of NC State and NWS Raleigh afforded me a volunteer student intern opportunity at NWS Raleigh. Upon graduation, I was offered a spot in the meteorology graduate program at NC State and also a SCEP position at NWS Raleigh - positions that provided an opportunity to have employment in the National Weather Service while completing my coursework. During the first semester of my teaching assistantship for a Synoptic Weather Analysis and Forecasting course, I was selected for a full-time position at NWS Raleigh. The offer of full-time, permanent, career-conditional employment in the NWS --my dream career that fulfilled my passions of weather and helping others-- was too good to pass up.

What got you into weather?

My fascination and childhood fright of thunderstorms, and a general curiosity about nature, provided an initial interest in weather. Winter storms and the related prospect of school closings were exciting too. That interest in weather soon became a passion, so I wanted to be either a meteorologist or a professional baseball player when I "grew up," and the probability of me earning a respectable living doing the latter seemed low.



What is your favorite type of weather?

The energy released and vertical accelerations generated by thunderstorms, and related storm/cloud structure, is awe-inspiring and beautiful. High-amplitude, high-impact gravity waves are fascinating as well.

What is your favorite type of weather to forecast?

Clear; it's the easiest! No, really, organized thunderstorm modes, including supercells and quasi-linear convective systems, are both challenging and rewarding to forecast.

What is the most challenging part of your job?

Balancing my analytical, methodical, and detail-oriented forecast process and approach with the time constraints of an operational setting can be challenging. However, it also ensures I stay focused on meteorological analysis, the weather watch, and forecasting --foundational to our ability to provide the most timely and accurate weather and water information to carry out the NWS mission-- every shift.

What is the best part of your job?

I love weather. I love helping people, being a public servant, and providing invaluable forecast, watch, and warning information to protect life and property and enhance the national economy. I also don't necessarily view what I do as a job. It's a passion that I find highly enjoyable and would spend a significant amount of time doing on my own. And thankfully, I am compensated for it.

What is the most memorable weather event you have covered in your career?

Probably like many of my peers, the historic tornado outbreak of April 16, 2011 will forever stand out. I was on midnight shifts, and we knew and had been messaging for several days that it would likely be a particularly active severe weather event. Both because of my excitement and passion for severe weather, and because I was more concerned for the well-being of my family than at any other time owing to hazardous weather, I didn't sleep until the tornadoes had passed and heavily damaged central NC that afternoon. Consequently, I took just a short nap before navigating the Raleigh tornado damage path en route to work for my next shift at 11 PM. Those days, and the few that followed as we surveyed and rated the intensity of the tornadoes and saw firsthand the devastation that resulted, were truly surreal.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I no longer have any; we have a toddler born last September (2018). Most of my time is spent with my wife (a former meteorologist and colleague who is now a data scientist), our son, and (ahem) five cats. I do still love baseball and play in the Central NC Men's Senior Baseball League (CNCMSBL). Exercise and weight training are a priority in part because I tend to eat a lot, and because health is important. I find live music, particularly at intimate venues and in support of independent artists, to be incredibly spiritual and rewarding.