

## **Meet Kathy Strebe, meteorologist at The Weather Channel, Atlanta, GA**

I'm one of those rare (in this day and age) folks who have been with the same company for 25 years! Not only that, it's been at a place that is a "weather weenie's" dream: The Weather Channel (TWC)! What more could one ask for, when your career, hobby, and workplace all involve the love of weather? Timing and luck were with me back in 1983...

### **How did you first get interested in weather?**

My father was, and still is, an avid amateur "weatherman", and that influenced me from an early age. Also, growing up by a lake in the Wisconsin countryside, weather impacted nearly everything I liked to do outdoors. The weather gamut ran from blizzards (back when winter was *winter*!) to tornadoes. So, with the excellent atmospheric science program being offered by the University of Wisconsin-Madison, it seemed natural for me to go there and earn a Bachelors of Science degree in meteorology.

### **How did you find your first job, and what was it like?**

Graduating with my BS degree in May 1983, I was initially looking for a TV on-air meteorologist position. I chanced upon an advertisement in a cable TV magazine of a new cable station in Atlanta, GA that was looking for behind-the-scenes forecasters. Yes, it was the fledgling "TWC"! I sent them a resume, accepted an offer over the phone, and started my career at The Weather Channel in early July 1983. Those first few years were a bit nerve-wracking, as we were a start-up operation and went day-to-day wondering if we were going to have a job if we didn't "make it" in the world of cable television. I remember all the jokes and comments like, "Who the heck would watch a channel that only showed weather 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year?" Hmmm, after 26 years, wonder who got the last laugh?

As a young forecaster, I worked the midnight shift (8p-6a) for seven straight years, which I enjoyed for the most part. Also, I was lucky to have many experienced meteorologists as fellow shift workers and mentors, and fortunate enough to work with, and learn from, the late, great, tropical weather guru, John Hope. Hailing from the upper Midwest like I did, I knew next-to-nothing about hurricanes; working with John soon cured me of that!

### **How would you describe your current job and how is it different from your forecasting job?**

For the last 4 years, I've been the Director of Weather Data & Strategy. My job entails a lot of diverse activities and some travel...being a liaison with the following: National Weather Service (weather data issues, surface observations), Federal Highway Administration (Road Weather initiatives), Transportation Research Board (task force/committee on surface transportation weather), emergency managers (coordinating mock hurricane landfall training exercises), researching/compiling weather-related content for marketing/sales/licensing/merchandising, managing the meteorology summer

internship program...mentoring interns and college students, active involvement in the American Meteorological Society (co-chair Student Conference, chair-elect Board for Private Sector Meteorologists, alumni member Board on Women & Minorities)...yes, I'm busy but love my "jobs"!

### **Is forecasting the weather part of your job anymore?**

Actually, no, although out-of-habit I stay "plugged-in" daily with what's going on weather-wise around the country/world. In addition, during U.S. hurricane landfalls (usually our highest ratings events), it's "all hands on deck" for us as we pull out all the stops in covering these events; everyone pitches in, regardless of job position!

I had been a forecaster/shift supervisor for about 10 years when I was offered the opportunity to go into management. I became the department manager of first the forecasters, then the weather graphics meteorologists, and those roles lasted about 10 years, too. I learned how to handle multi-million dollar budgets, give performance reviews, interview, hire, train. During this time I also became involved in mentoring and managing our internship program, and have enjoyed doing so ever since. Figure 1 is a picture with one of my interns, Michael Estime.



**Figure 1. Kathy Strebe with TWC intern Michael Estime.**

### **What would you say to those interested in working in the private sector?**

I'd say, don't be afraid to investigate "outside the box" of traditional meteorology jobs. I first thought only of forecasting or presenting the weather on TV, but had a chance to learn other skills and roles where my knowledge of meteorology was used in other ways. A couple other examples are jobs in IT with computer weather systems or in graphic design (creating weather map graphics/animations for TV or on-line or mobile platforms). Finally, try to get exposure to the field through internships or mentorships!