

Meet Mike Cetinich, Meteorologist and Product Manager at Jeppesen in Englewood, CO



I have been incredibly lucky to combine two of my favorite passions into my career. I have always loved meteorology and aviation, so becoming an aviation meteorologist as well as a student pilot satisfied my dreams for a career. Flying stopped due to a lack of time and money, but being involved in aviation and weather has continued. I have worked as an aviation forecaster, a meteorology programmer, manager of an operational meteorology department, and for the past 8 years have worked in product management of aviation weather and flight planning. Being with the same company for the past 25 years has also been a wonderful experience. As part of my job, I have traveled to Bangkok, Moscow, Anchorage, London, Frankfurt, and many less glamorous places in between. The highlight of my travels was to McMurdo, Antarctica in 2005 where I analyzed weather and flight operations for Raytheon Polar Services, the company that runs the U.S. Antarctic Program for the National Science Foundation.

How did you first get interested in weather?

Like many meteorologists I was fascinated by weather at an early age. My family traveled from the San Francisco Bay Area to Lake Tahoe in the Sierras frequently when I was young, and we were caught in numerous blizzards, which I thought was great fun, but not so fun for my parents. I always enjoyed being in extreme weather and feeling the power of Mother Nature. When I was 14 and on a bike ride in the Santa Cruz Mountains, I met a graduate student from the University of Washington, and he explained the science of meteorology and what careers were available. From then on my path was determined. I attended San Jose State University (SJSU) and obtained a B.S. in Meteorology with Honors and attended graduate school at SJSU working towards a M.S. in Meteorology.

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

While in graduate school at SJSU, there was a lecture series where people who had been affiliated with the University would speak about their current career. One day my future boss spoke about starting up an aviation weather group within Lockheed DataPlan, a company that provided computerized flight planning services. He mentioned that they were looking for a meteorologist to fill out the small group. After the lecture I spoke with him and submitted an application the next day. I went through the interview process and was hired within a week. Starting a full time job while still attending graduate courses was not easy, but I loved being a real forecaster, and I was also a student pilot at the time, so understanding how weather affects flights was easy for me to grasp and communicate to other pilots. I worked 12 hour shifts, either 0600 to 1800 or 1800 to 0600. It took a little while to get used to shift work and changing from days to nights, but I was able to adapt and really enjoyed the operational side of the business. I created aviation weather maps as well as spoke to pilots and dispatchers directly. Because my company also provided International Trip Planning services, we briefed corporate pilots as part of our job. It was quite a surprise to get a call one day and provide a weather briefing to a fun

loving pilot, whose name happened to be Jimmy Buffet. I would brief pilots that flew the likes of Paul Allen and Eddie DeBartolo around in their corporate jets.

How would you describe your current job and how is it different from a forecasting job and other jobs you've had?

My current role as a product manager is very different from being a forecaster. I am currently responsible for product development, profit and loss for our weather and flight planning businesses, and work closely with Marketing and Sales to receive feedback on current products and understand what our customers want in future products. My current role is very interesting and also very demanding. I work with many internal groups, such as Development, Marketing, Sales and Customer Service in order to develop and promote the best weather and flight planning products possible to the industry. My role as a product manager also involves a lot of travel, whether it is to customer sites, trade shows or industry events I am able to keep my premier membership on several airlines.

When I started as a forecaster, the work was intense but when your shift was over, the day was done. Mind you, working 12 hour shifts takes a lot out of you so there wasn't that much left in the day when your shift ended, especially when you were working 60 and 72 hour weeks to cover for colleagues when they were on vacation or sick. I once recall working 12 days straight. But as a product manager, the day is really never over. Keeping updated on customers, development projects, operational systems etc... requires being in touch almost 7x24. Fortunately now with PDA devices you can stay informed without being called at odd hours. I am glad I have been able to work at so many different things over the course of my career, as each new job presented new challenges and opportunities to learn new things and new people.

Is forecasting the weather part of your job anymore?

Officially no, but once a forecaster always a forecaster. Whether it's forecasting for colleagues, friends or family, I get asked for forecasts all the time. And I still enjoy the challenge of forecasting, the feeling of nailing a forecast is a wonderful thing, of course the inevitable bust always looms, especially in Colorado where forecasting is not always easy. I still get involved in special forecast events from time to time. Jeppesen has supported numerous record aviation attempts over the years, and they typically involve special forecasting. One notable trip was when Polly Vacher attempted to circumnavigate the globe going over the North and South Pole, and she attempted this in a single engine Piper Dakota, a plane not certified into known icing. Polly was doing this as her second round the world trip intended to raise awareness for disabled persons flying. To say this posed a forecasting challenge would be a supreme understatement. Polly and all of us that assisted her became great friends, as she felt we were her life line, and we intended to keep her alive. There were some close calls over the Pacific and over Antarctica, but Polly completed the trip. These trips are special to me, as it uses all of the knowledge and skills I have acquired over the past 25 years, and it ties weather and aviation to a new level.

I now also teach aviation weather to local pilots. It's a great way to give something back to the community I so enjoy, and hopefully increase awareness of phenomenon that is most likely to kill GA pilots. Providing information and education that can save lives is a good feeling.

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

First, I think tying any job to your passion is the key to a happy and successful career, no matter what sector the job is in. That said, I think the private sector offers the broadest range of jobs in meteorology. You can find jobs to fit nearly any aspect of meteorology in the private sector, and in many cases, you can find jobs that require multiple disciplines of meteorology, as well as acumen in business and other technical fields. I truly enjoy the challenge of creating and fostering a business for aviation weather products and services. The private sector also must interface with the government and academia enterprises, as we rely on each other to provide the solutions that the industry demands.



Figure 1. Looking over McMurdo base in Antarctica, with Ice Breaker ships in the background. I analyzed weather and flight operations for Raytheon Polar Services, the company that runs the U.S. Antarctic Program for the National Science Foundation.