

Meet Steve Harned; President of Atlantic States Weather, Inc. of Cary, NC and Executive Director of the National Weather Association

Being an “old guy”, I enjoyed a long (36 years) and varied career with the National Weather Service and now have been in the private sector for four years as president of a consulting firm I opened in 2004. I also have also been fortunate to have been selected to be the 5th executive director for the National Weather Association, the other professional association for meteorologists in the country.



How did you first get interested in weather?

Like many practicing meteorologists, I knew at an early age that I wanted to be a “weatherman”. Growing up in east Tennessee, I kept my eyes focused on the western horizon in the winter, awaiting the cirrus clouds announcing the approaching snowstorm. Of course, most of the time nothing happened but this fueled my enthusiasm (obsession) with the weather. My family was very tolerant of my weather watching activities such as looking out the window every five minutes or constantly calling the Weather Bureau for the forecast which usually had not changed in hours. My desire to be a meteorologist kept me focused in high school, and I was lucky enough to have been accepted into the meteorology programs at both Penn State and Florida State. Although I liked snow, east Tennessee experienced a particularly snowy winter during my high school senior year which made my college decision easy. I went to FSU!

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

The meteorologist-in-charge of the U. S. Weather Bureau office in Bristol, Tennessee attended our church. So for years I pestered him about the profession. He clearly saw my interest and was able to secure a Summer Aid position in his office for me which I began two days after graduating from high school. It paid \$1.99 an hour which was great in 1966. I worked summers for the Weather Bureau and attended FSU during the school year. I was fortunate to be permanently hired by the Weather Bureau while still in college. After graduating, I entered the U. S. Navy and served 3 years as a meteorological officer in Spain. After leaving active duty, I began my National Weather Service (NWS) (the Weather Bureau became the National Weather Service while I was in the Navy) career and had tours in Lubbock and Houston in Texas; Anchorage, Alaska; Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland; and Raleigh, North Carolina. I experienced just about all types of severe and hazardous weather including several hurricanes. This included being on Galveston Island Texas when major Hurricane Alicia made a direct hit in 1983.

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

I always wanted to see if I could form and operate a meteorological consulting business. I also had always been interested in legal proceedings (perhaps due to watching too many Perry Mason TV shows in the '50s and '60s) so I wanted to start a consulting firm specializing in forensic meteorological services. Basically forensic meteorology involves reconstructing the weather occurring at a specific time and location which impacts a legal proceeding. Unlike forecasting, this is done after the fact and requires extensive use of archived surface, radar, and satellite weather data. Fortunately, Atlantic States Weather, Inc. has been retained for many interesting and exciting cases. Much of



the work since early 2006 has been providing forensic services for attorneys representing homeowners in Mississippi and Louisiana who lost their homes in Hurricane Katrina. Other cases have involved winter weather, severe thunderstorms, heavy rains, high seas wind and waves, and boating accidents.

Figure 1. Photo above was taken at a deposition for a Hurricane Katrina case which was held in November 2007 in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. Left to right are opposing attorney, court recorder, Steve Harned, and the attorney who retained me.

Atlantic States Weather, Inc. provides a variety of consulting services in addition to forensics. One project I have been involved in has been to assist the North Carolina Flood Mapping Program in setting flood severity levels (minor, moderate, major) for dozens of new gaging sites across the state. Over the past decade, North Carolina has been hit hard with disastrous flooding resulting from tropical cyclones. This flooding has



affected all parts of the state including the mountains which are hundreds of miles from any coast. In 2004, flooding from the remains of Hurricanes Ivan and Jeanne devastated many areas of the mountains.

Figure 2. Photo to the left was taken on a trip to survey new gaging sites in the mountains. This was taken on the North Fork of the New River in Ashe County in far northwestern North Carolina.

Finally, as the executive director of the National Weather Association (NWA) I am responsible for the day-to-day operations of the 3000 member professional meteorological association. The NWA strives to support operational meteorology which focuses on forecasting and broadcasting. As a charter member of the NWA (formed in 1975), it is a great honor to be afforded this opportunity to serve the association.

Is forecasting the weather part of your job anymore?

No and by design. I completely enjoyed forecasting and supporting forecasting during my 36 year NWS career. However, I realized that owning a firm which provided forecasting services would require being available to provide services day and night, seven days a week. My firm will entertain any type of consulting services except for forecasting.

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

My message is directed primarily to those who have come to the end of a satisfying career but are not ready to “go to the house and sit on the porch”. With longer lifetimes anticipated by many, you may have 20 to 25 good years left after retirement. If you still want to remain in the profession, opportunities are available galore. The private sector offers many exciting opportunities from working for large meteorological firms to opening a business of your own. With a pension from your first career, your opportunities are even broader. Don’t go to the porch; stay in the game and in the private sector!