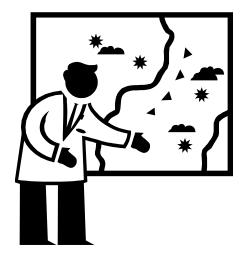
A Meteorologist



Mr. Tony Mainolfe Chief Meteorologist WCHS TV8 Charleston, W.V.

Why did you choose Meteorology?

I knew at a young age what I wanted to do ... I was probably about 7 years. I grew up on Long Island and we had two 25 inch snow storms in a span of about four days. I can remember snow drifts as high as my back porch and we would jump off the porch into the snow drifts about 15 feet out and ever since then, I was hooked.

What exactly do you do as a Meteorologist?

It depends on where you work. If you are a T.V. meteorologist your responsibilities vary on a daily basis. If the weather is like today, beautiful calm and clear, you attend daily meetings, put your graphics together and the day is pretty easy. On an active weather day, when a hurricane is going to make landfall and potentially affect your area or a snow storm coming, then your day is a little bit longer. During times like these a lot of people call you; emergency management folks, concerned public viewers, Board of Education, and teachers to name a few. They are trying to find out what is going on and there are a million things going on in the news room like setting up live shots and so on. If you happen to work for the airlines, jet fuel is a big concern and they will want to fly with the wind at their tails not at their heads. If you work with the government, of course, they have different constraints. For instance the folks down at the hurricane center have a big task when they have 3 to 4 million people who immediately have to evacuate. They have their hands full.

Do you have a specialization within your Meteorology degree?

When I was in College, I liked tropical meteorology and climatology. Although I don't have a climatology degree, I did take a lot of classes in those two areas, along with forecasting. At one point I almost went to graduate school to study tropical meteorology but a job came up, and I couldn't pass it up.

What is the average starting salary?

It varies from market size which is ranked accordingly. For example New York is the biggest market and is ranked #1. Flagstaff, Arizona is a very small market and is ranked 210. In West Virginia, Charleston is considered a medium size market, where Clarksburg is a small market. So, the starting pay in Clarksburg is probably \$15,000- \$20,000, in Charleston it is probably between \$40,000 and \$45,000. The longer you remain at a station you become a marketable commodity and therefore you are able to negotiate when that second contract comes along.

If you have a specialization, does the starting salary increase?

Not necessarily. Most commercial broadcast weather stations just want to hire somebody to present the weather. They just want a personality. However, at the weather channel they hire specialists who have doctorate degrees.

What were your most challenging subjects in college?

I was a double major and have a communications degree as well. The toughest class for me was Differential Equations. I had a German teacher who was hard to understand so that made the course that much harder. You learn about how the atmosphere works as a whole, and all these mathematical equations that you learn are used help create computer models and they want you to have this background knowledge. You don't use differential equation anymore, but you have to understand why you learned them and what purpose they serve.

The Doppler radar was a major step forward for detecting tornados and severe weather. What is the latest cutting edge technology you have been able to use?

We are using supercomputers which generate all of the daily forecast models especially when it comes to the tropics. We have made significant advancements in the accuracy of the 5 and 3 day forecast in tropical storms. The supercomputers are the biggest advancement in the last decade.

What do you think are the common misconceptions about the weather made by the general public?

I think you would be surprised at how many people think our job is easy. When people come in for tours and they see how things are done in front of a live audience, they are taken aback. We don't have a script or a teleprompter. So a good part of the day is putting together maps and so forth. Once people have toured the studio they have a better appreciation of what we do.

How is your view on the weather different now that you know how it works?

I don't think it is so different, I think it's a complex makeup. You know the weather is an inexact science, so I think you are always learning from one storm to the next. I think it is a lifelong process.

What was the trickiest forecast you ever had to predict?

Winter forecasting is always the trickiest because sometimes you've got the rain, snow and ice line. If you look at last winter when we had that ice storm in Jackson County, we had 4 inches of sleet here. You go literally 2 miles one way you've got one weather element, you go 2 miles the other way, and you've got a different element. So winter forecasting is by far the toughest. Forecasting thunderstorms and where they are going to pop up is tough, but forecasting how much snow versus how much rain will fall is very difficult.

What is the most enjoyable aspect of being a meteorologist?

I like that the weather is constantly changing and that it is an inexact science. This makes forecasting very challenging. Also I like doing public speaking and participating in community events. The biggest compliment that anybody can pay you when they meet you is when they say "hey, you know, you're a lot like you are on T.V. That is always an inspiration

Is there anything you would like to add or feel is important to know about this occupation?

In the field of Meteorology there are a multitude of career paths from forensics to the military. You can work for the government, private sector, airlines, weather service to name a few.

Interviewed by Brian Ord for a College 101 assignment on 12/04.