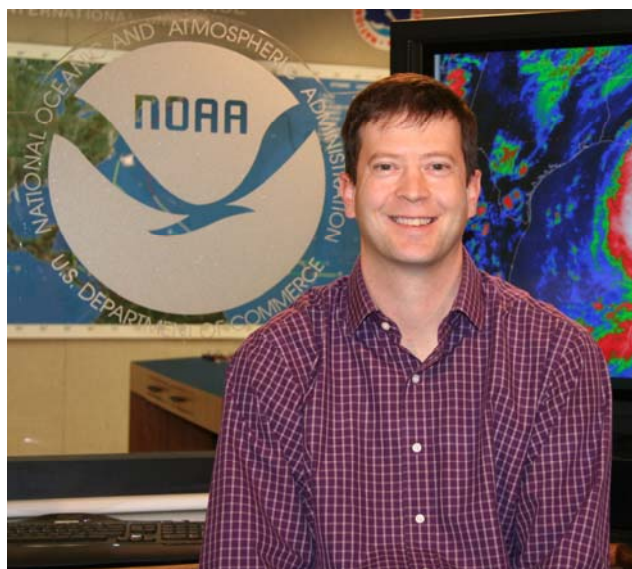


Q & A for NHC



Dan Brown

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*By Dennis Feltgen
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You are now the WCM for NHC. I have already noticed your impact.

Since being here at the hurricane center, I have enjoyed brainstorming new ideas and better ways to convey our message to our customers.

The Graphical Tropical Weather Outlook is a good example.

Well, I can't take all the credit for that- it was a team effort. It started with Jamie Rhome and I talking about it while we were forecasters in TAFB several years ago. With the increasing importance of the Internet, we felt there was a need to graphically show people where the disturbances were located that could develop into tropical cyclones. One of the biggest advantages of the GTWO is that we are able to control the message. I go home at night and see the local TV weather forecasters circling the suspect area using our color codes. It is very satisfying to see how widely used the product is today.

Did you always want to be in weather?

My Dad had an interest in following the weather. He lived in Jacksonville, Florida as a child and kept a journal in which he recorded the high and low temperatures. He never made it a career, but his interest in the weather was surely passed to me. Growing up

in Western North Carolina, I was fascinated by the occasional snowstorm as well as the day to day weather. By the time I was in high school, I knew that I wanted to make a career out of my interest in meteorology.

Did you experience any hurricanes while in the Carolinas?

I was a freshman in college when Hurricane Hugo (1989) impacted the Carolinas and we only felt the fringe effects. I did not experience a full blown hurricane as a child...I was just fascinated with tracking them. I went to the University of North Carolina – Asheville as a meteorology major. I also worked as an intern at NOAA's National Climatic Data Center in Asheville for about a year and half.

What did you do there?

I quality controlled Cooperative weather data from around the country. One of the interesting projects that I worked on was quality controlling weather observations from the '93 Superstorm. We reviewed snowfall totals and looked at the liquid equivalent.

That internship was good foot in the door.

It was. I ended up applying to the National Weather Service. At the time, I didn't want to be more than a day's drive from the western Carolinas. I actually put a preference on the application for north and central Florida. But the way the application worked, it included the entire state. So when I got the call from the administrative officer at NHC about my interest in a job at the hurricane center, I was very surprised.

What was the job?

I was an intern in the Tropical Analysis and Forecast Branch (TAFB). I began about a year after Hurricane Andrew had struck, and I was told there might some difficulty in finding a place to live. There was still quite a bit of damage and things were just starting to be rebuilt.

Were you with TAFB for long?

I worked in TAFB for a couple of years before going down the hall to the Miami National Weather Service Forecast Office. I was a forecaster there for about three years and then moved back to TAFB in 1998. It was a great experience working at the WFO because you got immediate feedback on the local forecast, right or wrong. I actually got to work the radar during several interesting tornado events, including the downtown Miami tornado. I issued the tornado warning for that event.

When did you cross the hallway as a hurricane specialist?

After the busy 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons, several new hurricane specialist positions were created and I applied for one of those. I certainly have enjoyed crossing over to the hurricane side. For a few years before that, I worked as a hurricane support meteorologist (HSM) during the season. I got my feet wet and did a few forecasts, so it really helped me out.

What are some of your memorable moments on the hurricane side?

Some actually go back to before I came over as specialist. I was working an HSM shift during Hurricane Charley's landfall in 2004. I will never forget that day. My parents live on the west coast of Florida between Naples and Ft. Myers. Having them over there, and Charley coming ashore a little further south than previously thought, created some anxious moments for me. I was working with Miles Lawrence that day. I was tracking Charley on the radar while he was doing the forecast. Not only was there a change in the heading of the storm but also a rapid increase in the intensity. I also worked some HSMs during Hurricane Katrina. Both seasons proved to be quite memorable.

It was a calmer season when you came over in 2006.

It was, and that helped me to get settled into the new position. Of course, 2007 and 2008 were busier. Hurricane Ike is certainly a storm I won't forget. I did a couple of the forecasts when it looked like it might be a threat to South Florida.

What do you see as your greatest professional challenge right now?

In the role as the WCM, I certainly want to coordinate our outreach effort here at the hurricane center. The challenge is to educate the public and emergency managers on NHC products and their tropical cyclone risk. Hopefully, that knowledge will lead to making the best decisions when a storm is threatening their area.

Bill Read has stated over and over again that the problem is not complacency, it is denial. How do we get past that denial stage?

It is tough to get past the denial stage. I have witnessed that first hand with both my parents and in-laws who live in coastal regions in South Florida. When Wilma was coming, it was hard for them to understand the potential impacts from the Category 2 or 3 storms. Most people, including my family, have not experienced the direct impact of a hurricane; they have only been on the fringes. After the fact, people will say they did not realize it was going to be that bad. This is something we have to try to communicate more clearly.

What do you do in real life? I know you're a busy dad.

I have two kids under the age of five. That takes most of my time. I enjoy playing golf, but the clubs have not been out of the garage very often since the kids were born. My family enjoys outdoor activities such as the zoo, beach, and local parks. We certainly take advantage of the south Florida winters.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Probably still at the hurricane center. I do enjoy what I am doing.

You are already the WCM, you are already a senior hurricane specialist. Where do you go from here?

That's a good question. I have not been the WCM for very long and I enjoy the interaction with the emergency managers. I want to continue in that role and try to expand NHC's support to the emergency management community when they are making tough decisions preparing for a storm.

Send comments to: nhc.public.affairs@noaa.gov