

Central Oklahoma Chapter of the AMS/NWA Spring 2007 Activities

The Central Oklahoma Chapter of the American Meteorological Society and National Weather Association (COCAMS/NWA) has been brewing up a whirlwind of activities at the new National Weather Center (NWC) in Norman, OK.

The Chapter took an extended break during summer and fall of 2006 while many of its members transitioned to life at the NWC. Mid December saw the first COCAMS meeting in the new building which is home to numerous federal, state, private sector, and University of Oklahoma organizations that work together in partnership. Officers Patrick Burke, Amy Gardner, Jeremy Grams, and Kit Wagner were elected at the December meeting, and the group began brainstorming to keep COCAMS activities fun, personable, and scientifically stimulating. In a January 2007, meeting guest speaker Kevin Scharfenberg of the National Severe Storms Laboratory reviewed a pioneering project to gather high density verification of hail falls. The data will, in turn, aid in developing radar-based hail detection algorithms. Sticking with the frozen precipitation theme, in February, Derek Arndt of the Oklahoma Climatological Survey provided historical perspective on an ongoing bout of unusually cold and icy weather, and discussed implications for what had been a long term drought in Oklahoma.

Soon after, warmer weather set in, and COCAMS looked forward to the coming spring with a double presentation on National Weather Service strategies to warn for severe thunderstorms and assess storm damage. About 35 people attended the March 15th meeting, including 15 special guests representing the Iowa State Student Chapter of the American Meteorological Society. This joint Chapter meeting saw John Ferree, the Severe Storms Program Manager for the NWS Office of Climate, Water, and Weather Services, lead off with his presentation entitled "Storm-Based Warnings." John discussed the NWS transition from warning on a county basis to warning for particular threats over smaller polygon areas.

All this would have made for a fine meeting of its own, but there was much more to come, as Jim Ladue and Ed Mahoney, instructors at the NWS Warning Decision Training Branch, delivered a lively introduction to the Enhanced Fujita Scale for rating tornado damage. Using side by side projectors, they took the audience on several interactive damage surveys, demonstrating both how the EF-Scale was developed, and how it should be applied. Following this stimulating hour and a half meeting, COCAMS members and the visitors from Iowa State reconvened at a local restaurant for pizza and discussion.

March also brought the two marquee outreach and collaboration activities that have become a COCAMS tradition. COCAMS cosponsored and chapter officers assisted in conducting the National Severe Weather Workshop in Norman March 1st through 3rd. COCAMS officers judged Junior and Senior High projects at the Oklahoma State Science and Engineering Fair in Ada, OK, on March 30th. Two weather radios and two American Meteorological Society award certificates were presented to students with meritorious projects in the Earth and Atmospheric sciences.

Though the community was fully absorbed in severe weather season by mid April, COCAMS managed to host another outstanding meeting on the 19th. Among the topics discussed was the officers' recent visit to a meeting of the University of Oklahoma Student Chapter of the American Meteorological Society (OUSCAMS). In fact, several OUSCAMS members attended the April 19th COCAMS meeting, a sign of the growing collaboration between the two groups. The meeting continued with a storm chaser/meteorology themed trivia game in which several prizes were awarded. This event had been advertised as part of a strategy to generate excitement and encourage even more of our rich community of professional meteorologists to attend. Kevin Scharfenberg of the National Severe Storms Laboratory correctly answered 15 of 20 severe storms and meteorology related questions to receive a copy of the Storms of 2006. Several other winners received storm chaser kits and OUSCAMS t-shirts.

One of the winners was the guest speaker, Robert Johns, retired Science and Operations Officer for the Storm Prediction Center. Bob has been an active COCAMS member since moving to Norman with the SPC in 1994. He has a wealth of experience, having forecast severe storms professionally for over 30 years. Bob presented:

“Parts of the 1925 Tri-State Tornado Project: Details of the damage path, storm-scale information, and some personal issues concerning this historical event.”

Bob has been working as part of a team of meteorologists (Doswell, Crisp, Maddox, Hart, Burgess, Gilmore, and Piltz), traveling county by county through Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana, interviewing survivors and gathering data to perform a detailed analysis of the tornado's path. Thus far, their evidence shows, incredibly, that damage may have been continuous along the approximately 219 mile path of this tornado. The tornado killed 695 people.

Finally, the April 19th meeting ended with formal spring elections. Each of the four incumbent officers was nominated without opposition, and each accepted their nomination to remain serving in their current position. The officers and several COCAMS members then gathered at a local restaurant for dinner and further discussion. A final spring celebration and Bar-B-Que was held May 10th. The chapter looks forward to meeting at least one time this summer before returning to monthly meetings in the fall.

- Patrick Burke
COCAMS/NWA President