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Gary Lezak, Meteorologist

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Munzer Sky 12/25/21
Christopher Spaw

GARY LEZAK, METEOROLOGIST

“The Flint Hills is where everything collides. The air descending east from the Rocky Mountains crashes into the warm, moist air moving up from the Gulf of Mexico, and that collision creates all kinds of fascinating weather.”

Gary Lezak

After 37 years in his profession, meteorologist Gary Lezak still loves talking about the weather. Currently chief meteorologist at KSHB 41 television, the NBC affiliate in Kansas City, Missouri, Lezak earned a Bachelor of Science in meteorology from the University of Oklahoma in 1985. In recent years, he’s been developing a scientific method for predicting significant weather events months before they happen.

How did you develop your passion for weather?

I have been interested in weather since I was 5 years old. In 1978, when I was 16, my parents gave me a “Star Wars” calendar, and I started keeping daily weather entries in there. I have done daily entries ever since. I also created weather games when I was a child.

What does a typical workday look like for you?

I am up early to do weather and sports on the local Sports Radio 810, WHB. I arrive at KSHB 41 around 1 p.m. and prepare and deliver the weather forecasts during the 4 p.m., 5 p.m., 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. newscasts.

**What do you enjoy most about your job?
What's the most stressful part?**

I LOVE sharing our weather knowledge with Kansas City's most accurate forecast every day. I just LOVE weather and talking about it, and I get to do it on TV each day. The most stressful part is when there is a risk of tornadoes.

**What would surprise people
about your work?**

During normal newscasts, the producer and director are running the show, but when there may be a tornado, I'm calling most of the shots. While I'm running the radar and letting viewers know where a tornado might appear, I'm also tossing information to the anchors, the other weather team members and our storm chasers in the field. I'm making these decisions in real time on the fly. It's very intense and a lot of pressure. This coverage can go on for hours. It's reality TV!

**What is unique about weather patterns
in the Kansas Flint Hills?**

The Flint Hills is where everything collides. The air descending east from the Rocky Mountains crashes into the warm, moist air moving up from the Gulf of Mexico, and that collision creates all kinds of fascinating weather.

These two geographical features — the Rockies and the Gulf — are the biggest

reasons why the United States has nearly 60% of the world's tornadoes. Most of these tornadoes happen east of the Rockies. The U.S. averages close to 1,200 tornadoes per year, while the rest of the world has about 800 tornadoes per year.

On a day that might produce a tornado, it is often completely clear over Kansas until the first clouds form about 2 in the afternoon. One hour later, a thunderstorm might form and a tornado might develop. Predicting the weather from completely sunny to a tornado is quite difficult, but forecasters have gotten good at it with increasing accuracy.

Forecasters in other parts of the country will see a thunderstorm form over Kansas, and then they will predict when the storm should arrive at their locations. This makes it somewhat easier to predict the weather in other locations.

**Have you had close calls or encounters
with Kansas weather?**

I went tornado chasing in 1999 with my brother Scott. We drove all the way to near Sitka in Clark County, where we experienced an EF-3 tornado that ended up chasing us. It crossed the road behind us, and it was a chase of a lifetime!

**Did you predict 2022 to be a wild
weather year in Kansas?**

Yes, I'm expecting a wild tornado season in 2022, based on the weather forecasting

technology I use. If the prediction is right, the tornado total will more than double last year's total of 46, with more than 100 tornadoes in 2022.

**How important is passing on
your knowledge?**

It is extremely important. Through a company I founded with another meteorologist, I have been working to advance an emerging weather forecasting technology that is now being used to predict significant weather events months before they happen. The technology is based on what is known as the Lezak Recurring Cycle, a scientific method of forecasting weather. The LRC is based on a cycling weather pattern that was first discovered in the 1940s. Turns out there is order in what most people think is chaos in the river of air above us.

I think the new forecasting technology will change the way meteorologists forecast the weather. What I have learned must be shared and taught to young meteorologists.

What are your biggest challenges?

My biggest challenge now is to learn more about the cycling pattern theory and to help save lives by bringing more awareness to severe weather events that are approaching.

**What special recognition has meant
the most to you?**

I have won eight Regional Emmy® Awards. I am most proud of the ones for best weather forecaster!

What would you like your legacy to be?

Someday I hope I'm recognized for advancing the idea that the weather pattern is cycling, and that we can know what the pattern will look like up to 300 days into the future. With this kind of accurate information, residents and businesses in an area with a hurricane or tornado outbreak predicted would have not just days, but weeks or months to prepare. Farmers could plant earlier or later based on this information. Businesses could include this information in their business analytics. This knowledge will help businesses and save lives!