

# A day on the job in the Weather Office

by Eric Stanzeleit

6:10 a.m., it's warm in bed and it would be nice to stay there, especially today. A moment to collect a few thoughts, a moment to reflect back on yesterday's forecasts — today it should snow and blow. A quick look out of the bedroom window — it's good news — already the winds are strengthening out of the south-east and visibilities, even in the pro-

last evening's radio and television weather broadcasts and the one hundred thousand people in the listening area of Southwestern Manitoba were all looking for the same snow and the same strong winds.

On the nine mile drive to work at the Brandon Airport Weather Office, my mind reviews yesterday's synoptic fea-

low pressure cell, that did not quite exist yesterday, moving into the Western Dakotas. Snow and blowing snow from this system, I visualize, will have now spread into Portage and north of Dauphin.

The flight service specialist on the night shift has all the incoming forecasts and weather reports neatly filed. A quick glance through the latter and 7:00 a.m. weather reports indicate the storm is well on its way. A quick read through the area forecasts from Edmonton to Toronto confirm the mental synoptic picture and a scan through the public forecasts indicate we are on track — storm warnings are in effect.

It's a quick scan through because at exactly 8:00 a.m. CKLO Radio will be phoning for the first of its three regularly scheduled weather broadcasts of the day. This one will be on tape and will parallel a live broadcast on the CKX AM/FM, the other popular Brandon station, at the precise moment of 8:11 a.m. BBM ratings over the past several years show that this is a peak audience time for both stations. Our 3 to 5 minute broadcasts must be accurate and detailed as many a day's plans will be based on them. Hundreds of salesmen who gravitate out of this hub city will change their travel plans today. Trips to Winnipeg down the stormy Trans Canada Highway will be cancelled. Cattle buyers from the big meat processing companies will stay home because of cancelled auction sales. City workers and the

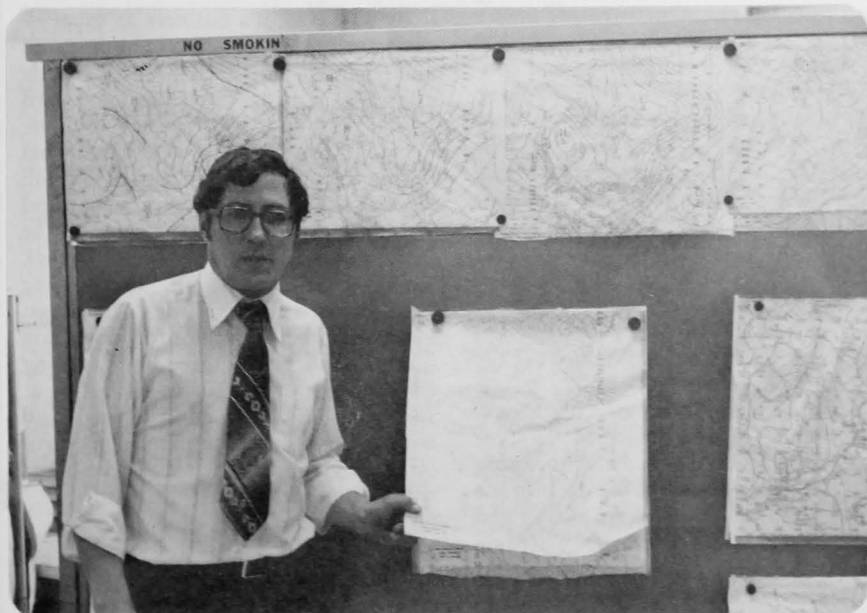


*Eric Stanzeleit, monitors the teletype traffic.*

tected river valley city of Brandon, are showing signs of deterioration. "Good, it's snowing", I mumble to my wife. "What's good about that?" she says. Without answering I am already thinking about the charter flight that was scheduled to head 200 miles north for Swan River and that was cancelled because of the forecast of bad weather. Three doctors and several nurses changed their work day because of it, not to mention all the cancelled business appointments. I also think of the Grade 5 class from Linden Lanes School that had planned to visit the Planetarium and the Pan-Am Pool in Winnipeg today and had changed their travel plans as well. I would be seeing many of these students in the hockey arena later in the week and the barbs of a bad forecast and a cancelled fun trip would be sharp. "Where was that storm, Mr. Stanzeleit?"

Today we were right though, a last minute telephone conversation with the public forecaster in Winnipeg late yesterday afternoon had confirmed local suspicions of a pending storm. A twelve hour advance warning had already gone out in

tures. By the time of the 7:30 arrival at the office I can already picture the intense

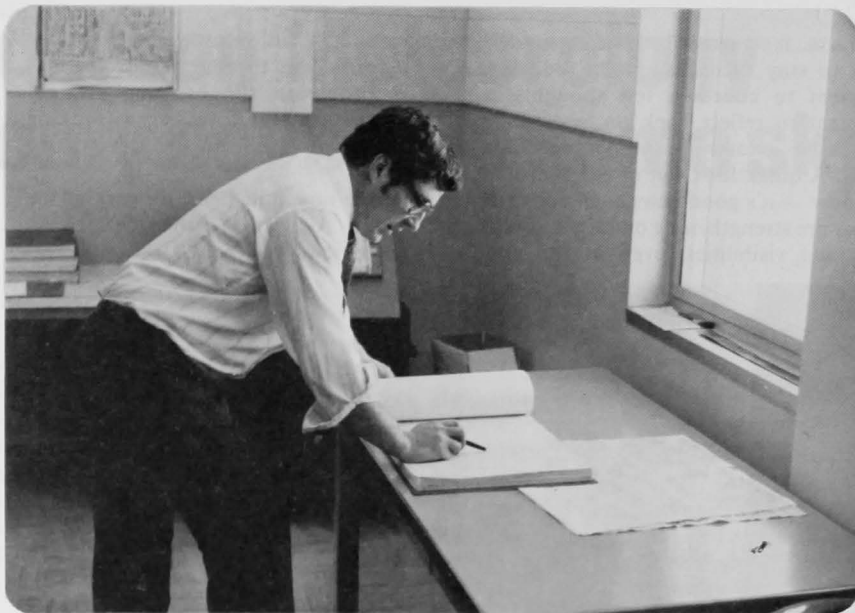


*Holds a map discussion.*

Provincial Department of Highways will be holding back crews to work later tonight and tomorrow if the storm clears.

The next three hours will be the busiest of the day. Plotting and analysing a local surface weather map to pinpoint frontal positions and cloud and precipitation areas will take an hour or more. A study of the upper winds, a couple of tephigrams and the national weather facsimile charts will use up another 45 minutes. A phone call to the public forecaster in Winnipeg to confirm the accuracy of the spectral prognostic charts and to exchange ideas on the upcoming regional public forecasts will consume more time. In between the phone will ring. On this day, the superintendents of the numerous school bus divisions will all attempt to reach the Weather Office for more detail on the forecast and the storm. Some, in the Boissevain — Deloraine areas nearest to the storm centre, will not run buses, while further north in the Russell and Neepawa areas, where the storm's activities will not reach their full intensity until late in the afternoon, the buses will run. Hundreds of rural schools will open or close on this advice. Forecast information will be exchanged for actual weather reports as call after call comes in from the RCMP dispatch centres, and Greyhound and Grey Goose bus terminals, the outlying subdivisions of the Department of Highways and the dozen or more active flying clubs this office serves.

By 11:00 a.m. work will start on the detailed noon radio weather broadcasts. All of the available information including both forecast and actual weather conditions for an area within a radius of 150 kilometers will be compressed and condensed into a 5 minute radio broadcast. This broadcast will be heard, as it is every day at 12:10 p.m., on any one of four radio stations, in city homes, rural farm houses, car radios and in the offices of many weather orientated businesses. Dozens of coaches and managers of hockey leagues will make personal decisions as to whether they will proceed with or cancel travel plans for upcoming evening games. Virtually thousands of hockey players from Pee Wee to adults will be affected by these decisions. Jack Brockest, owner of the Western Hockey League's Wheat Kings and his concession staff will be expecting a big drop in the evening crowd. Foremen from City and Municipal Works Departments will begin assembling snow clearing crews to start work after midnight on the strength that the storm is ending.



*Investigates office records.*

By one o'clock the heaviest work load is over. A careful watch is maintained in the event that the storm changes intensity and direction. Individual weather requests continue to filter in to confirm the forecasts but there is now time to maintain weather and climatological records and to answer the day's mail. A request comes in for a school tour of the Weather Office in two weeks time and a service club wants to know if we can send a representative to speak to its members next month.

By 3:00 p.m. it's business as usual — two more radio broadcasts to be prepared and recorded. These will be aired shortly after 5:00 p.m. to catch the homeward bound rush hour traffic. They will confirm that the storm is in fact going to end during the night and that tomorrow will be clear and cold. The television map and script are prepared and delivered to the local station in time for the six o'clock news, weather and sports. The evening shift is briefed and ready for work. At last I can go home — but not for long. I am scheduled to give a three hour evening class in aviation meteorology starting at 7:00 p.m. in the Brandon Flying Club hangar. There won't be many of the regular 20 students there, but the die-hards will be, and so will their instructor.

It's 6:10 a.m. — the sky is clear, it's cold and the storm is over. A feeling of relief steals over me. I will have few criticisms when the Junior "B" Hockey team

that I happen to coach face the Elkhorn Canadians in Brandon's Keystone arena tonight. □

*Eric Stanzeleit is a presentation technician at the Brandon, Weather Office, Central Region.*

In the above article, Eric Stanzeleit gives some excellent personal reactions to working in a weather office. Last summer's Zephyr questionnaire revealed a fair number of reader requests for more individualized articles. Accordingly Zephyr hopes to run a new one-page feature called DATELINE PERSONAL. If you would like to write about your job (even if it is only marginally related to meteorology), describe some climatological or environmental experience at home or on vacation, or express some forthright opinions on anything from the long-term effects of automatic weather stations to dealing with acid rain, just sit down and type out about three pages of double-spaced copy. Make it interesting, use the first person, express yourself simply and non-technically and send us a photo. These are surefire ways of breaking into DATELINE PERSONAL. □