



## Meet The Weatherman, Greg Fishel



By Emily Kiser, The Raleigh Chronicle 18.JAN.08  
RALEIGH - Meteorologist Greg Fishel is in his 26th year with WRAL-TV. The Raleigh Chronicle talks with him about his job over the years and his plans for the future.

Fishel began working for WRAL in June 1981, and has since reported on nearly every extreme from a weather standpoint. From the coldest temperature ever observed in Raleigh in 1985, to the hottest in 1988, his career began with an obsession that he credits to a defective gene and a fear of thunderstorms.

"My dad was somebody who would sit out on the porch and if lightning struck 10 feet away, he'd sit there and say, 'Oh boy, that was cool,' and I'd be running for cover in the bathroom," Fishel said. "And I can remember being at my grandmother's place when I was fairly small and it was really, really windy, and...I couldn't bring myself to not run to the window and make sure that we were okay."

This obsession turned into a passion, which prompted him to get a degree in meteorology. He's lucky, he said, to have a job that he is so enthusiastic about.

"If you're lucky enough, you or anybody, to have your hobby also be your career, it really doesn't get a whole lot better than that," he said, "because you're not just doing it for the money, you're doing it because you have a passion for it."

One of the stories that impacted Fishel was in 1984, when a tornado outbreak south and east of Raleigh killed 57 people in two states.

"I remember that night going from worrying that I had overplayed it, to four hours later worrying that I hadn't done enough," he said. "It was a real eye-opener for me because, I think up until then you looked at red on the

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radar and said 'Oh cool, a big thunderstorm,' and now you are all of a sudden realizing people have lost family members, people have lost their homes, and it puts a whole different light on it."

Before going to WRAL, Fishel worked at three other jobs over a two-year period. Having no idea what the word 'longevity' meant, Fishel said the job just happened to work out, and since then, the station has become a place where everyone wants to stay.

"As time has gone on, the company that we all work for here has become increasingly unique in the sense that it's one of the few locally-owned TV stations left in the country, and I think that's what's made it so attractive," Fishel said.

While meteorology has a lot of science in it, Fishel said there is still an artistic element. Two people can look at the same weather map and one can make more sense of it than the other, he said, adding it's one of those intangibles where no one can quite pinpoint exactly why that is.

"We're trying to gear everything we do with as much science as we can, but we also try to be very honest with people and tell them that the science is not foolproof by any stretch, and that there will still be surprises," he said. "And then we kid about the fact that weather forecasts are never wrong, it's just the timing's off."

Technological advances, however, have put a bit more emphasis on science. When Fishel arrived at WRAL, he would have to dial a phone number and have it download in order to show one eight-color satellite picture, which would take about 20 minutes. Now, the station has 256-color images coming in over satellite in a matter of seconds.

Radar has also improved. The station used to have a phone line that was dedicated to the National Weather Service radar, which Fishel described as a "conventional World War 2 radar" that showed where it was raining, and that was about it. Now, the station owns and operates its own radar.

When he arrived they were still using magnetic maps to show the forecast. There was a map of the United States and one of North Carolina, and he would stick little symbols with magnets on the back to the maps in order to show the weather for the area.

"I remember the first time we ever did the chroma key thing, where we stood in front of the green wall," he said. "That was, oh my gosh, that was just considered to be so high tech."

The station also used facsimile machines that would make all the weather maps that came in from the government every day. The machines used wet paper, and they would burn an image into the wet paper, and when it printed out, he would rip it off and hang it on the wall.

"I guess in the mid-80's, or early 80's, they came up with a way to print these charts on a dot matrix printer, and it was like, 'Oooh, this is cool,'" Fishel said. "It's just interesting that what was so exciting back then is common place now."

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When Fishel looks back to the time when he worked mornings in the 80s, he remembers one Halloween when he and the staff had the "Great Pumpkin Shootout."

"We had trashcans positioned all over the studio, and we'd throw these little pumpkins trying to get them in the trashcan," he said. "I have very fond memories of those times."

But Fishel also seems to enjoy where he is now, saying he doesn't see himself anywhere but at WRAL in the future, and that he's not the only one. Of the six fulltime employees in WRAL's Weather Center, with the exception of Producer Nate Johnson who was added to the team in November, the person with the shortest tenure is Meteorologist Elizabeth Gardner, who is going into her 10th year with the station.

"In television, there's so many folks that they feel like they've got to get to a big market to be 'successful,' so they'll use a station like this or any station in this market as a stepping stone to get to where they really want to be," he said. "I think it's just one of those things where a lot of us have come to the conclusion that the quality of life here and the way the company treats you is more important than being able to say that you work in New York or Los Angeles."

The fame of being a TV personality, however, does not escape Fishel, who gets recognized by viewers. This is something that happened, he said, when he came to the station, which had 56 percent of the audience at 6:00pm.

"The other TV station I worked for was in a little town called Salisbury, Maryland," he said. "The highest rating we ever had for our 6 'o clock was 2 percent of the audience, so I could go anywhere I wanted in town and no one knew who I was."

After arriving at WRAL, he had to adjust to the fact that people were recognizing him. One day in the 90's, he had a stomach bug the day before an ice storm was coming, and stopped at the grocery store on the way to work to pick up some chicken broth and jello.

"It never dawned on me that the grocery store would be jammed because of the pending ice storm, and as I walked down the aisle way this one gal looked at me and she says, 'Oh my God, if you're here it's really going to be bad,'" Fishel said. "At the time, I didn't see the humor in it much, but I look back on it and I say, 'That's a great story.'"

One thing that comes with the exposure is being blamed for the weather. Fishel said he thinks most times people are kidding, though he does have a response for them.

"I had a pastor years ago that came up with a great comeback," Fishel said. "He said, 'Just remind people that you're in sales, not in production.'"