

COLUMNISTS



Haneisen: Calling all weather geeks

By Rob Haneisen

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It's not too early to think about snow. Really.

According to the Farmer's Almanac, this winter is supposed to be unusually cold and snowy. Remember we had flakes flying before Halloween last year in a winter we won't soon forget.

I know yesterday was the first official day of autumn, and I know temperatures all this week are supposed to be pleasantly mild in the 70s.

But I like to be prepared, get anxious, and I know there are some of you out there just like me.

Say it, and say it proud: You are a weather geek.

And here at the MetroWest Daily News, we have a mission for you. We need your help.

As a weather geek, I have been known to sprint across the newsroom to catch up-to-the-minute satellite imagery. I rejoice when inclement weather bears down on our region and always volunteer to write stories with any weather angle. For example, last week's faded Hurricane Isabel still provided an excuse to write about wind gusts and their effects on the apple crop.

But there's usually something missing from our winter weather stories and this is where you, fair reader and fellow weather geek, come in.

Snowfall totals received from the National Weather Service can be sporadic. I'll usually be able to find snowfall measurements for a few MetroWest towns but not enough to adequately represent the main circulation area of our newspaper.

What we need is a group of designated weather watchers -- consider yourselves part of the weather geek army -- to accurately, diligently and joyfully report snowfall totals for each storm throughout this winter.

Admit it, you've either thought about doing this or are planning to do it anyway. What I'm presenting to you is a legitimate reason to give your spouse, family and friends about why you have to keep track of snowfall and that, yes, in fact, there is an honorable duty attached to obsession with weather.

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What you would have to do is simply e-mail or call in your snowfall totals for each storm. We'll report them in the newspaper and tell readers who our watchful weather geeks are. We'll track the totals all winter long, run interesting graphics from time to time to catch a reader's eye and be able to say with confidence exactly how much snow fell this winter. It will be fun and it will also be a way for you to help inform your community.

Based on a column I wrote last year about my own obsession with weather (something I blame on my family's penchant for melodrama and exaggeration), I know there are untold numbers of you already reaching for the phone to volunteer for this most coveted of duties. I can't tell you how many e-mails I received last year from folks exclaiming, "I thought I was the only one!"

So I am forced to be a bit selective.

First, we will need one dependable person from each of the following core communities: Ashland, Framingham, Holliston, Hopkinton, Hudson, Marlborough, Natick, Northborough, Southborough, Sudbury, Wayland and Westborough.

Next, tell me a bit about yourself, some of the typical facts you would put on a job application and then briefly explain why and how badly you are obsessed with weather. Do you have any weather-observing equipment? What is your favorite weather? Essentially, tell me why you are the best person for this mission in your town. There are no age restrictions as long as you are dependable.

This only works if everyone keeps his or her commitment. I'll provide instructions from weather professionals about how to properly measure snowfall so we will all be on the same page.

As a newspaper that prides itself on local coverage, the addition of accurate snowfall totals from our core towns will be a great service to our readers -- your neighbors and friends. Also, most weather observers will note there often can be a great difference in snowfall, particularly with mild coastal storms. Eastern communities such as Natick tend to receive far less snow than Hudson to the west or Hopkinton which is at a slightly higher elevation. Snowfall records for Boston and Worcester support this argument as well, with Worcester getting 97.7 inches of snow in December through February last year and Boston only getting 60.5 inches.

If we are lucky enough to get some big storms this winter a reporter will call you to see how the neighborhood is holding up and what conditions are like in your hometown. There also might be some days we'll ask you to report on temperature if some extreme weather occurs.

So send me an e-mail at the address listed below and make your pitch to be one of our official weather watchers for MetroWest. Weather geeks need to band together, to unite in our obsession and maybe convert a few along the way. I look forward to your camaraderie.

(Rob Haneisen is the central regional editor of the MetroWest Daily News. He can be reached at rhaneis@cnc.com or 508-626-3882.)

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