

Skywarn network watches our skies

By Casey Hane
staff writer

MOTHER NATURE is an independent woman, a world traveler and an unpredictable soul.

She makes her own decisions, translating moods into torrents of rain, buckets of hail, or a sky whipped into the fury of a tornado. Many people play a role in emergency procedures taken from the time severe weather hits southeast Michigan to when information reaches the general public — either through emergency broadcasts or weather sirens.

During a severe weather alert, meteorologists and others manning the National Weather Service district station at Detroit Metropolitan Airport keep an eye on radar signals and an ear to radios. Spotters in an eight-county area will give them a firsthand account of weather.

The National Weather Service also monitors weather in a 125-nautical mile radius, which encompasses southern lower Michigan, northeast Indiana, and northern Ohio so other weather service offices can be advised.

MEANWHILE, 20 to 30 spotters from a trained pool of 150 from Oakland County's volunteer Skywarn network are in their cars, placed at specific high-elevation locations.

From here, they will monitor general weather in the south and southwestern skies, watching cloud formations for unusual weather and the possibility of funnel clouds and tornadoes in their given areas.



Jim Wades (left) consults with meteorologist Bill Deodler of Livonia at the National Weather Service station at Detroit Metropolitan Airport. Wades, a former Farmington Hills resident, founded the Oakland County Skywarn program.

The highly trained eyes and ears of the amateur radio operators transmit the needed information to the National Weather Service, which, in turn, issues appropriate severe thunderstorm or tornado warnings from the metro post, or watches from the National Weather Service facility in Kansas City, Mo.

Tornado warnings mean a funnel cloud or tornado have been spotted. A tornado watch means conditions are favorable for a tornado forming.

Without Oakland County's spotters, severe weather warnings may be more frequent, or possibly

erroneous, according to the experts. The National Weather Service radar systems measure only weather precipitation.

Although tornado conditions can be assumed by looking at radar, actual tornadoes cannot be viewed, according to Marvin Green, Oakland County resident and head meteorologist at the National Weather Service Metro Airport facility.

"It takes both radar and spotters" to help in deciding a weather warning, Green said. Most spotters are volunteer amateur radio operators, and he estimates there are upwards

of 400 trained for Skywarn in some of the counties his office serves. Other Skywarn-certified people include police officers, firefighters, public safety personnel and general citizens interested in the program.

CONFIRMING A spotter's report is "not a sure thing in any case," Green said. "The ham radio operators are more reliable than most. We try to get two reports before doing anything, but there is no way that's foolproof."

Better safe than sorry might be the motto for the Skywarn program. A fatal tornado touched down in West Bloomfield Township and Farmington Hills in March 1976, prompting addition of tornado sirens and formation of the Skywarn program in Oakland County, according to Mike Cleary, volunteer Oakland County emergency coordinator for the National Weather Service.

Skywarn began in 1980, through the efforts of former Farmington Hills resident and amateur radio buff Jim Wades, who today teaches Skywarn classes throughout Oakland County.

Before the tornado, which killed an Oakland County teen-ager, there were few warning efforts in Oakland County, according to Wades. A group of amateur radio operators tracked the storm, which came from Muskegon, but could do nothing because "no network was set up," Cleary added.

Today, the volunteers are trained and certified not only in Skywarn, but also check each of the 10 area sirens in Oakland County as the

county tests the overall siren system.

WADES CALLS the Skywarn program a "community effort." The one- to two-hour training program uses audio-visual aides and provides students with meteorological and tornado safety information. "We try to give the weather service a handle on the weather," he said, "and we look for more than a tornado or funnel cloud."

The program must also be flexible in terms of personnel, because of spotters' work schedules, according to Wades and Cleary.

Although the Skywarn network "covers the whole county fairly effectively," Wades said, the majority of the spotters are from south Oakland County, where areas are more populated.

Enhancing the network is the Oak-

land County Emergency Operations Center, which initiates tornado sirens countywide when instructed by hotline from the National Weather Service.

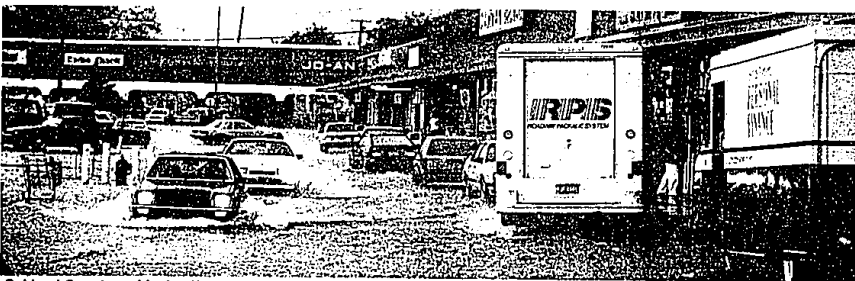
Disaster Control Coordinator Tracy McGee agreed the 1976 tornado "had a lot of impact" on today's emergency systems in the county. The one-siren system, when activated, will give a steady three-minute tone, she said, unlike the local fire departments, which use a high/low tone system.

"We still get calls because people don't understand what the sirens mean," she added.

"Luckily, we haven't seen anything like the people in Texas," Cleary said about Michigan weather. "We don't usually get the really severe weather. I'm just crossing my fingers that nothing happens."



Photos by RANDY BORST/staff photographer



Oakland County residents attempt to drive through a shopping center during a heavy spring thunderstorm. Weather conditions like these catch the Skywarn network's attention.

short takes

If you recently opened a shop, captured an award, earned a promotion or are planning a new venture or project — and there's a Farmington-area business angle — we'd like to hear from you so we can share your news item with other Farmington Observer readers. Send items to: Short takes, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River, Farmington 48024.

• 3 INSTALLED

Nancy Taylor of Farmington Hills was installed as treasurer by Our Lady of Providence League of Providence Hospital, Southfield.

Jane Hoffman and Kathleen Leahy of Farmington Hills were installed as service representatives.

• EARNIS AWARD

Awards for hours of service to Providence Hospital patients and staff were presented to 150 members of Our Lady of Providence League, the Southfield hospital's principal support group in volunteer service to the community.

Those from Farmington Hills are Mary Duncan, Judy Brauer, Kathleen Leahy, Nancy Taylor, Irma Aydelotte, Virginia Busfield, Richard Getson, Kathleen Getson, Lina Givvys, Esther Gold, Virginia Hess, Glen Robinson, Sylvia Seidman, Mabel Zeissler, Graziano Canini, Francis Crimaldi, Shirley Curran, Beverly Kish and Mary Toffoli.

From Farmington is Karen Viny.

• NEW LOCATION

JB Communications Inc. relocated to 30600 Telegraph, Suite 2820, Birmingham 48010.

According to president Janet Burpe of Farmington Hills, the move is due to expansion. JB Communications specializes in publications editing, design and production. Its work has received numerous awards from such organizations as Council for Advancement and Support of Education, Women in Communications Inc., American Institute of Graphic Arts and International Association of Business Communicators.

JB Communications was formerly at 30600 Telegraph. Phone number, 645-9252, remains the same.

• JOINS VET HOSPITAL

Dr. John Richardson and Dr. David Carron announce the association of Dr. Connie Miziejewski at the Plaza Veterinary Hospital in Farmington.

Miziejewski graduated from Cen-

tral Catholic High School in Toledo in 1978. She attended Michigan State University, majoring in physiology, until being accepted into the College of Veterinary Medicine at Michigan State University in 1982.

As a veterinary student, Miziejewski spent two years involved in biomedical research dealing with the nervous system. She also worked as a teaching assistant of canine anatomy to freshmen veterinary students.

She recently completed and externship at the Animal Emergency Clinic Southeast in Houston.

Maziejewski received her degree in Veterinary Medicine from Michigan State University in June 1986.

• WORLD-CLASS TRAINING

St. Claire Inc., a full-service technical communications company since 1941, publishes an informative brochure entitled "Technical Training For World Class Competition."

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• NAMED EXECUTIVE

Kelly Brown of Farmington Hills was appointed executive engineer of fuel economy, emissions and noise control planning at Ford Motor Co. Brown began his career with Ford in 1973 as a technical standards engineer in the automotive emissions office.

Following several technical standards assignments, he was named supervisor of car certification programs in 1978. In 1981, he was named emissions control analysis and planning manager, his most recent assignment.

• JOINS PRACTICE

Dr. Elizabeth Michels, dermatol-

gist from University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor, joined the dermatology practice of Dr. Jon H. Blum in Farmington Hills.

The combined dermatology office of Blum and Michels will offer expanded hours, six days per week, and free skin cancer examinations.

The availability of both a male and female dermatologist in one office, may make patients more comfortable when they have this free complete skin examination to check for skin cancer.

In addition to prevention and detection of skin cancer, Blum and Michels treat acne, warts, moles and other skin growths. They have collagen treatments available for age lines and wrinkles.

The dermatology office is in the Quakerstown Medical Arts Building, 32905 12 Mile. Phone 553-2900 for additional information.

• JOINS FIRM

Christopher Scapelliti has joined Hermanoff & Associates, Inc. as an account executive.

In 1984, Scapelliti joined the Detroit public relations firm of Anthony M. Franco Inc. as an intern for special events projects.

He was later appointed to positions as copywriter and account executive, trainee.

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