

BUSINESS PROFILE

Hurricane season is over, but Dave Roberts' work roars on

BY EVAN WILLIAMS
ewilliams@florida-weekly.com

For Dave Roberts, the on-air meteorologist for Southwest Florida radio stations B103.9 and 106.3 WJPT, the 2007 hurricane season was anti-climactic, a balloon filled tight with disastrous predictions that deflated instead of bursting.

The United States was largely spared from significant land falling storms with Lee County missing the dangerous excitement altogether. However, several hurricanes did form, including two back-to-back Category 5s that hit Central America.

"This was supposed to be one heck of a season with nine hurricanes and five major ones, according to longtime season predictor Bill Gray," Roberts said. "The U.S. government's season forecasters called for the same if not a little less."

Roberts, who was a television weatherman for Wink TV and Fox 4 in Fort Myers, before switching to radio two years ago, said blaming the forecasters for poor predictions would be a mistake.

"Weather is not an exact science, not yet," he said. "We've been studying the climate on this planet in modern day terms for about 150 years. This on a planet that is five billion years old. How much do we really know about past weather conditions and their impact on the future?"

Long term forecasting is often a betting game with bad odds, he said, the last few years' predictions being proof of this.

"However, there was incredible accuracy as to where individual storms were forecasted once they emerged on the weather maps," he said.



FLORIDA WEEKLY PHOTO BY EVAN WILLIAMS

Meteorologist Dave Roberts and wife Dawn among the many palms trees at their Fort Myers home.

That's what he does: predict weather in the short term, decide where that already formed cluster of activity in the Atlantic will go and if it will become a hurricane, or not. Weather tracked and predicted in the short term, he said, rather than over the course of an entire season, has a great deal of accuracy.

"My job is kind of critical because I'm predicting where hurricanes will go, and effects like storm surge and wind," he said. "It can cause a lot of pressure at times."

When Roberts isn't weather forecasting on the radio, he is a private weather consultant and hurricane forecaster for the city of Sanibel and the Shell Point community, and chief meteorologist on weather tracking website Dopplerdave.com. The website includes information compiled from national weather services and universities around the

world, and includes reams of information and many colorful maps which describe weather of all varieties, with a special emphasis on the tropics.

Roberts also started a real-estate business with his wife, Dawn, called SWFLforsale.com, last August.

"I'm not afraid of a challenge," he said, of starting the business during what is seemingly the worst time for real estate. "If we can't figure out how to run this business now, then we shouldn't do it and it's done well for a start-up."

The couple plans to expand the business into something larger, a Southwest Florida business, as the name suggests, not just Lee County. Roberts also grows and sells palm trees, rows of which surround his house in Fort Myers. He also produces local television

commercials for Nino's and Comcast.

And he doesn't want to give any of it up, he insisted, but instead merge meteorology and real estate with palm tree farming, television commercials, and family life.

"What's going on with hurricane season? What's going on with real estate? In effect, I'm predicting two different things," he said.

Sometimes they work together. For example, he said it is a myth that hurricanes have hurt the real-estate business.

"Real estate actually went rough the roof overnight after Hurricane Charley," Roberts said.

"It's no secret that Florida has hurricanes. The rest of the country deals with tornados and blizzards. The bottom line is, when it's 18 degrees in Flint, Mich., people still want to live in Florida."

Roberts got his start in weather forecasting interning for CBS in New York during summer break from high school in New Jersey. His first paycheck in forecasting was at a radio station in Pompton Lakes, N.J., for \$10.07.

"Every time it rained, the station was flooded," he said. ■

Offseason Hurricane Event

- >>Who: Meteorologist Dave Roberts
- >>What: Hurricane seminar, "What did and didn't happen in Hurricane Season 2007."
- >>When: 10 a.m., Saturday, Jan. 5
- >>Where: Barefoot Beach State Park in Collier County
- >>Fee: Parking (or Free with a Collier County Beach Pass)
- >>Directions from downtown Fort Myers: Take 41 South to Bonita Beach Road, turn right. Make a left at the entrance to Barefoot Beach Park.

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5252 Summerlin Commons Blvd., Suite 101
Fort Myers, FL 33907