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Ron Bell/DOC
President George W. Bush speaks at NOAA.

NOAA Employees Set the Presidential Stage

President Bush Visits NOAA

—By Jana Goldman

The wave pool was cleaned. The auditorium was fitted with a red velvet rope along one aisle. Hundreds of feet of metal tubing supported yards of blue fabric draping in the science center. The president was coming to visit NOAA in Silver Spring, Md.

While the president would only be on the NOAA campus for a little more than an hour on Feb. 14, many people worked for days in advance to ensure that during that time NOAA shined.

Mary Anne Whitcomb of NOAA Research was informed the president was coming on Friday, a little less than a week before his visit.

"Several of us sat down and started brainstorming what exhibits we could put together. This began a process through which many NOAA staff spent hundreds of hours preparing for the event," she said. "The transformation of the science center was in full swing by Tuesday."

That transformation included a thorough cleaning, changing light bulbs and hanging the blue draping that served as space dividers and backdrop for the dozens of cameras that would be clicking away during the visit.

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President Bush Announces Global Warming, Clear Skies Initiatives

—By Dane Konop

President George W. Bush came to the NOAA campus in Silver Spring, Md., Feb. 14 to announce new proposals for reducing air pollution and industrial emissions of greenhouse gasses without harming the U.S. economy.

Joined on stage by NOAA Administrator Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., U.S. Navy (Ret.), EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman, Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham and Commerce Secretary Don Evans, the president announced what he

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Ron Bell/DOC
Barbara Watson (left front) of the National Weather Service shows President Bush (center) weather forecasts for Crawford, Texas, where his ranch is located, while (left to right) Weather Service Deputy Assistant Administrator John Jones, Commerce Secretary Don Evans, EPA Administra tor Christine Todd Whitman, NOAA Administrator Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., and Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham look on.

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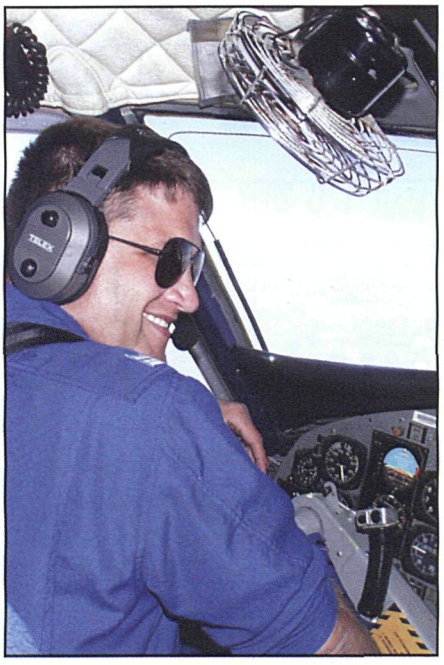

Michael Eastwood/NOAA

NOAA junior officer of the year Lt. John Longenecker pilots NOAA's Twin Otter.

John Longenecker Is NOAA's Junior Officer of the Year

—By Jeanne Kouhestani

Lt. John Longenecker shared the limelight with President Bush recently at the annual meeting of the Reserve Officers Association, which honored the president for his handling of the war against terrorism and recognized Longenecker and his counterparts from the six other U.S. commissioned services as the junior officers of the year.

Longenecker, who works in the National Ocean Service's Hydrographic Surveys Division, said receiving the award was "definitely a surprise, but really an honor."

Division chief Capt. Sam DeBow said Longenecker is "an exceptionally talented officer. He led a number of diverse projects this past year [that] were very demanding and were either occurring at the same time or overlapped. John was up to the challenge and exceeded all expectations."

Marine Sanctuary Program Dedicates Research Boat to Pentagon Crash Victims

—By Nancy O'Donnell

Under a sun-filled sky on Skidaway Island, Ga., Feb. 20, staff from NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program gathered aboard a former Coast Guard patrol boat to rename the vessel the *RV Joe Ferguson*.

Less than five months earlier on an equally sunny day, Ferguson, director of the National Geographic Society's education and outreach program, and Geographic Society travel director Ann Judge were escorting a group of Washington, D.C., students and teachers for a week-long field trip to the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary.

Shortly after their airliner lifted off from Reagan Washington National Airport, it crashed into the Pentagon, killing all on board.

The Santa Barbara, Calif., workshop they were headed to had been planned, with Ferguson's help, to introduce the students to the ocean world through the Sustainable Seas Expeditions, a project of underwater exploration and discovery with a special emphasis on the nations 13 national marine sanctuaries, jointly conducted by the society and NOAA.

The 11-year-old, sixth grade students and their teachers had been selected to participate in one of the sanctuary's exploration education events.

Teacher James Debeuneure and student Rodney Dickens were representing Ketcham Elementary School. Teacher Sarah Clark and student Asia Cottom were from Backus Middle School. Teacher Hilda Taylor and student Bernard Brown were from Leckie Elementary School.

At the boat's naming ceremony at the dock of the University of

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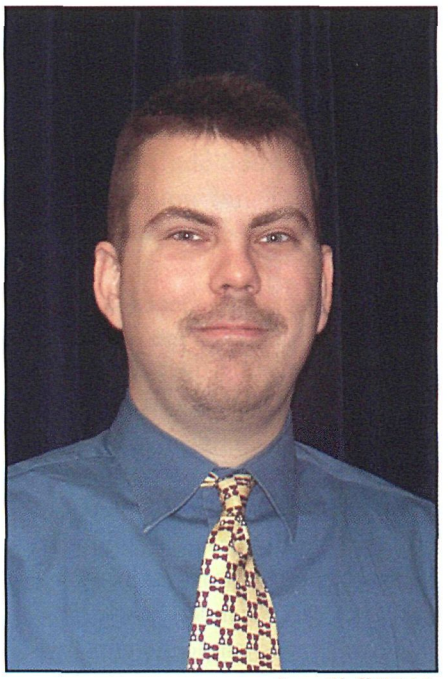
Greg McFall/NOAA

National Marine Sanctuary Program staff cast white rose petals in the water in memory of the students, teachers and National Geographic staff who died in the Sept. 11 Pentagon airliner crash while enroute to the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary.



Jerry Slaff/NOAA

Mike Walker.

Mike Walker Is the Team Member of the Month

—By Dane Konop

If you've had a chance to catch any of Scott Gudes' many talks over the past year—from budget summaries to town hall meetings—you've likely seen the work of Mike Walker, the March Team Member of the Month.

Walker was the person projecting computer graphics onto a screen to illustrate Gudes' words: images of ships and satellites, radar domes and Argo floats.

Since coming to NOAA last April, Walker, a graphic designer for RSIS, Inc., designed and developed all the computer-generated presentations Gudes made while acting administrator.

In just his first week on the job in the Program Coordination Office in the Hoover Building in Washington, D.C., Walker found himself tasked with preparing a presentation to Congress. Walker, who came from NASA's graphics department, said it was the first time he had worked at the upper levels of an organization. He felt challenged, he said, in a good way.

"I can't remember what style [the presentation] was, but it was budget-related. Within a week, I was up on the Hill, clicking the button. I just picked up something one of the 'PCOers' had started here, cleaned it up as much as I could and went with Scott up to the Hill," he said.

"I came over from NASA and I rarely worked on any kind of Earth study, least of all to that level. So I'm up there putting images in. It was pretty much sink or swim. All I could do was go on a bunch of acronyms that people were throwing at me. Argo floats? I didn't know what an Argo float was. I had no idea."

With the help of the scientists in the Program Coordination Office, Walker learned fast, quickly producing polished computer graphics as he learned more about NOAA's mission.

"Joanne Swanson, [the Weather Service liaison] here, for the past year has been particularly helpful in turning me into a weather weanie," he said. "Joanne has been great answering any questions I have. What's a wall cloud? What's AWIPS? What's AHAPS?

"I can't even begin to expound upon how informative every single one of the PCO people are," he said.

Walker says he gets the images he uses mostly from the NOAA photo library on the Web, from Marc Kagan in NOAA's video studio and from Alan Eustis in the Weather Service's three-dimensional visualization lab.

"I just go to their page and do a search on anything I need," Walker said. "Give me an image of a radiosonde. Or I'll go directly to the Weather Service site. If I can't

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Don MacDonald/NOAA

Mary Matta.

Mary Matta Is the Employee of the Month for March

—By Lori Harris

Crab roundup time in El Salvador's Gulf of Fonseca. It's 105 degrees Fahrenheit with 100 percent humidity. Mary Matta's glad she packed those extra five gallons of Gatorade in the boat today.

It's time to run the boat into a likely mudflat so the occupants can jump out and quickly scoop tiny crabs out of the mud before they can escape their fate. Matta and her boatmates drop them into buckets for lab sampling that will measure the metals, DDT and other pesticides that Hurricane Mitch stirred up when it swept Central America in October 1998.

She needs to find out whether the hurricane caused serious environmental effects for local shrimp fisheries and posed accompanying human health issues.

Her group, made up of El

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Focus On...

Behind the Scenes at the Ocean Sciences Bowl

—By Michael Quigley

It's lunch hour in early February at NOAA's Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory in Ann Arbor, Mich.

In the main conference room, a dozen employees sit at three tables arranged in a triangle with a tangle of wires running from a series of box-shaped electronic devices across the floor to a larger central box.

The employees are asking each other questions, interspersed with odd electronic beeps.

"Physical science, multiple choice, toss-up: High frequencies are used to tell krill their relative position from their neighbors because the frequency strength increases over time, stays the same over distance, decreases rapidly over distance or cannot be heard by all species of krill?"

Beeeeeep!

"The answer, team A?"

"Stays the same over distance."

"Correct. Physical science, short answer, bonus..."

The gathering is a mock competition practice session in preparation for the fifth annual Midwest regional competition of the National Ocean Sciences Bowl.

The event is one of twenty-two regional competitions being held this year across the nation between teams of students who compete in short answer "quiz bowl" matches testing their knowledge of ocean and Great Lakes science, technology and social science.

The regional competition is co-hosted by the Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory, Michigan Sea Grant, the Cooperative Institute for Limnology and Ecosystems Research, the University of Michigan, the U.S. Geological Survey's Great

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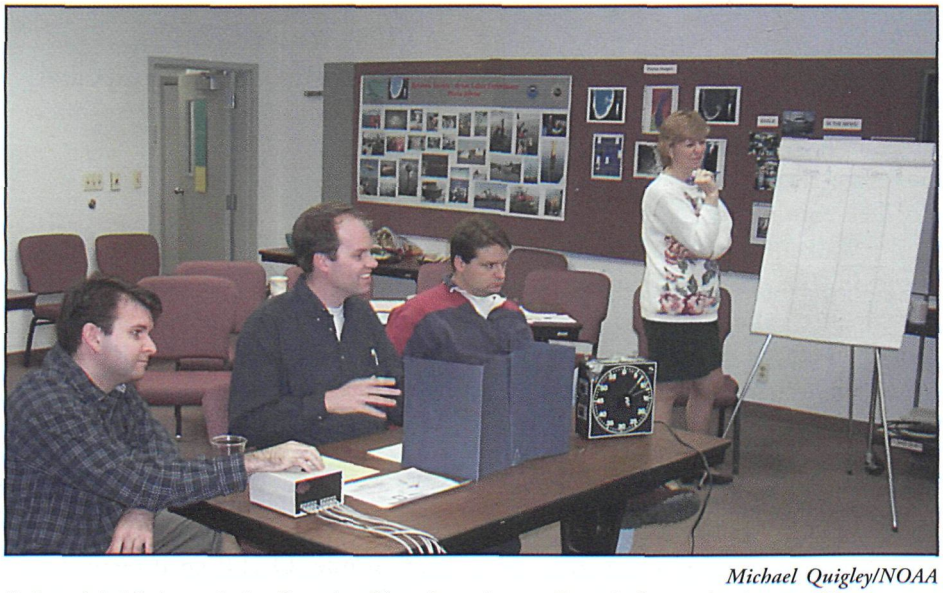

Michael Quigley/NOAA

(left to right) Science judge Brandon Giroud, moderator Brent Lofgren, timekeeper Glenn Carter and scorekeeper Barb Wrenn practice for the Midwest regional ocean sciences bowl.

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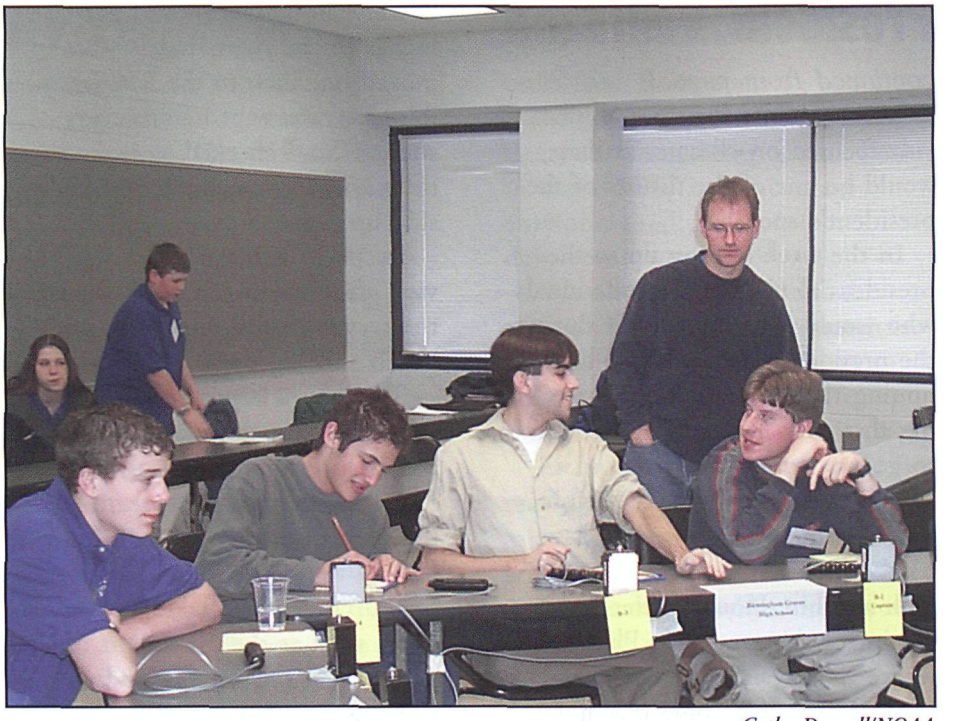
Lakes Science Center, Smith Group JJR and ALTARUM, a remote sensing company. Additional sponsors include Southwest Airlines, Hampton Inn, Domino's Pizza, Barry Bagels and the Dexter Bakery.

The competition is aimed at raising student interest in coastal and ocean science, while encouraging teachers to use lake and ocean processes in teaching fundamentals of biology, physics, chemistry, geology and math.

Regional science bowl coordinator Carole Fletcher explained that the practice sessions were designed to train bowl officials by simulating actual match play during the competition.

"Basically, we form two teams from our pool of officials, and these teams play individual matches against each other, while others serve as scorekeeper, moderator, science judge, rules judge and timekeeper," she said. "The moderator asks a series of multiple choice and short-answer questions during an eight-minute half, and players on the two teams compete to buzz-in on the electronic 'lock-out box' system for the opportunity to answer questions.



Cathy Darnell/NOAA

Students from Berkley High School and Port Hope High School prepare to face off in double elimination competition, as a coach looks on.

"There are a surprisingly large number of situations that can develop during the match play, and we try our best to acquaint our officials with what they might encounter and how to properly respond," Fletcher said.

She noted that the training was put to the test on Saturday, Feb. 23, when 11 teams of high school students squared off for the daylong event.

"Again, we were really pleased with how smoothly everything went, and so were the students and the coaches," she said.

This year's Midwest regional winner was Port Hope, Mich., High School. The students and their coach will now advance to the national competition to be held in Providence, R.I., in April.

In the meantime, Fletcher said that the regional bowl officials will meet after the event for a debriefing to get feedback on how planning and coordination of future competitions might be improved.

"We've gained a lot of insight on how best to run the event over the past five years," Fletcher said, "but with each competition, we've found additional ways for improvement."

Cathy Darnell/NOAA

Port Hope High School students and coach discuss strategy during halftime break in the ocean sciences bowl competition.

President Visits

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Most exhibits for the president's visit focused on climate, as that would be one of the thrusts of the president's speech.

In the week leading up to the presidential visit, those individuals who would staff the exhibit during the president's tour worked hard honing their presentations, knowing that they had only a short time to get their messages across.

Whitcomb said the day before the visit, there were two dry runs by the president's advance team, with a White House staffer standing in for the president. Places where the president would stand were marked with blue tape. The advance team marked the spots to ensure the best lighting, a courtesy for the cameras that would be photographing every presidential move.

In the hours before the visit, final touches were made to the exhibits and presentations. Posters were arranged on easels. Posters were put up. Posters were taken down. Easels were moved two inches to the right. Easels were moved one inch to the left. Invisible dust was wiped from every surface. Staff checked to make sure their NOAA lapel pins were right-side up.

At 10:30 a.m. on the day of the visit, the final sweep was done by the security team, complete with bomb sniffing dogs.

Two hours later, those holding tickets to hear the speech were admitted into the auditorium. Some brought paper work to pass the time until the 2 p.m. speech. Others were entertained by the final arrangements taking place on stage, such as the placement of the presidential seal on the podium and the care that was taken to ensure it was straight.

While the audience waited, the president toured the NOAA Science Center, stopping at each exhibit.

Barbara Watson, the warning coordination meterologist at the Weather Service forecast office in Sterling, Va., which covers the Washington-Baltimore region, gave the president a Web tour. The president particularly liked the fact Watson showed him how to view the latest weather forecast of his home town of Crawford, Texas.

"He liked the Web page, but indicated that he unfortunately is not going to Crawford and do I have a forecast for Korea. I indicated that we did and gave him a forecast for the trip to take with him," she said.

Next was an exhibit by the Air Resources Laboratory, which does air quality research. Staffing the exhibit were laboratory director Bruce Hicks and meteorologists Glenn Rolph and Ronald Draxler.

Hicks recalled that the president "reacted strongly and immediately positively to the information that our air quality work is in close collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency. He called [EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman] over to listen closely to what I was saying."

Hicks also noted that the president showed an interest in the NOAA Twin Otter, a light aircraft that is fitted for air chemistry work.

Draxler presented a laboratory computer model that is used to determine the likely transport of smoke, dust and other particles in the atmosphere.

"The president asked about the calculation method and how the model was run for real situations," Draxler said.

Ants Leetmaa, director of the Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory in Princeton, N.J., was stationed at the Immersadesk, a virtual reality device that shows climate events in three dimensions.

"The thrust of my 60 seconds was to talk about how NOAA research has led to a better understanding of major climate anomalies, like the recent droughts in Texas, and the ability to forecast these seasons in advance," he said.

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Dane Konop/NOAA

Under the watchful eyes of the Secret Service, President Bush (center) wades into a crowd of NOAA employees following his climate and air quality address at NOAA.

President Visits

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Stan Wilson, director of international ocean programs for NOAA Research, explained the global Argo array—autonomous devices that ride on ocean currents and collect and transmit ocean data used in climate forecasting.

The president saw the long term warming record from the National Climatic Data Center exhibit as well as the observations showing that November 2001 to January 2002 was a record warm period in the Unites States.

"The president was able to learn about climate change from [the climate] exhibit," Wilson said, "then see a major satellite component [NPOESS] providing part of the needed observational suite, then a major part of the in-situ network, Argo, and then hear from Ants about climate impacts, especially on his ranch."

President Bush also inquired about abrupt climate change and using the ocean to sequester carbon.

His final question was, "Was it ever going to get cold again?"

"I suggested that probably not until the next Ice Age. So the entire conversation was about five minutes," Leetmaa said.

After completing the circuit of exhibits, the president was led into the auditorium to deliver his speech. Twenty-five minutes later, it was all over.

As the presidential motorcade sped off back to the White House, NOAA Administrator Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., expressed his pleasure at the event and especially at the team effort that made the day a success for NOAA. When told this was the first presidential visit to the NOAA Silver Spring campus, Lautenbacher said, "I don't know how we can top this."

RV Ferguson

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Georgia's Marine Education Center and Aquarium, Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary director Reed Bohne remembered Ferguson's dedication to science and his passion for introducing children, unfamiliar with the ocean, to all its wonders.

"The staff at Grays Reef felt it was important to name the vessel in Joe's honor in recognition of all he has done to educate students about the marine environment and America's ocean treasures," Bohne said.

The *RV Joe Ferguson* will be the primary research vessel of the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary in Georgia.

Sanctuary staff plan to use the vessel to patrol sanctuary waters, maintain buoys, conduct reef fish and habitat assessments, and monitor water quality. The boat will also be used to assist local scientists in individual projects. The vessel, converted for scientific and educational programs, will be re-powered with new engines and made ready for full use this spring.

National Marine Sanctuary Program director Dan Basta joined sanctuary managers from around the country in honoring Ferguson and the other crash victims.

"The new vessel will greatly improve our research capabilities and allow the staff to spend more time on the water protecting sanctuary resources," Basta said. "Naming the vessel in Joe's honor is our small gesture to remember those that were lost on Sept. 11.

"This was the first but it won't be the last time we remember and celebrate the brave students and educators who died on Sept. 11," Basta said. "We are grateful for Joe's dedication in sharing our national marine sanctuaries with others. His work will not be forgotten."

Bush Initiatives

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called "a new approach that will clean our skies, bring greater health to our citizens and encourage environmentally responsible development.

"It's an honor to address this topic at NOAA, whose research is providing us with the answers to critical questions about our environment," Bush said.

Facing a standing-room-only crowd of employees, the president said, "Economic growth is key to environmental progress, because it is growth that provides the resources for investment in clean technologies."

The president called for legislation that would reduce industrial emissions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and mercury that "contribute to urban smog, acid rain and numerous health problems for our citizens," he said.

"Global climate change," the president said, "presents a different set of challenges and requires a different strategy. The science is more complex, the answers are less certain and the technology is less developed."

Calling for a flexible approach that can be adjusted for new information and new technology, the president said, "My administration is committed to cutting our nation's greenhouse gas intensity," which he defined as the amount of emissions per unit of economic activity, "by 18 percent over the next ten years."

This will prevent over 500 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions, "the equivalent of taking 70 million cars off the road," he said.

"We can tap the power of economic growth to further protect our environment for generations to follow," the president said. "And that's what we're going to do."

Walker

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find what I'm looking for, I'll ask the PCO rep here to get me the information."

Walker credits his sister with getting him started in the graphics field early.

"My sister was a graphic designer in my home town. She taught me a lot when I was going to high school," he said.

Throughout high school and college at Memphis State, where he studied creative writing, he worked on the side as a graphic designer.

"Eventually the vocation turned into a career," he said. "Pretty much officially ten years ago I abandoned school and went to the full fledged career in graphic design."

But if the truth be known, as good a provider as graphic design has been for him, Walker said he has another, more compelling calling: bowling.

"I do take bowling very seriously," he said. "I've been bowling since I was a little kid. I bowl in a lot of tournaments. If anything, I'd prefer that turn into my profession."

He's not quite there yet.

"My average right now is 184. In order to be a professional, you have to have a 200 for two years," he said.

But professional bowling remains a real possibility. He has a big tournament in Pittsburgh on March 23. He's optimistic about his chances.

"The last tournament in Richmond was pretty pitiful. But the one before that, the one I had in Philly last year, was quite fruitful," Walker said.

However he fares on the lanes, he said he's not giving up his day job. "I'm here for the duration. I'm here as long as I'm needed," he said."

Matta

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Salvadoran Navy, health department and other officials, has never sampled anything. Moreover, they don't want to get muddy. But before they know it, Matta has motivated them into an enthusiastic, trained team that can't wait to get to the next sampling station.

Matta, a Ph.D. fisheries toxicologist with an undergraduate degree in biological oceanography, is as comfortable creating consensus in tropical sampling gear, waist-deep in Central American mud as she is in conference rooms setting agendas for effective restoration plans. Her goal is the same in both places: build workable strategies to improve coastal habitats.

Matta is helping NOAA improve coastal habitats by redeveloping "brownfield" urban areas and coastal habitats, working with other agencies to create national restoration strategies to restore coastal and estuarine habitats and solving problems associated with sustainable port development.

Matta is a leader in the Coastal Protection and Restoration Division of the Ocean Service's Office of Office of Response and Restoration, said division chief Alyce Fritz. The office's stewardship mission is to protect and restore coastal resources adversely impacted by hazardous substance releases.

Beginning in 1980 with the Deep Ocean Mining Environmental Studies Project, Matta has helped set agendas that meet NOAA's objectives to advance coastal protection and restoration. She is particularly skilled in forming strong working partnerships and achieving consensus, in constructing logical, technically defensible arguments and in designing strategies to create win-win situations, Fritz said.

Matta has coordinated meetings, set agendas and built strong working relationships that, in turn, build more effective restoration programs, both within NOAA and with other agency partners in several forums. "For example," Fritz said, "she integrated and expanded NOAA's role in national restoration strategy and planning through NOAA's partnership with Restore America's Estuaries."

Matta co-wrote several chapters of the soon-to-be-published national strategy for coastal and estuarine restoration.

She also coordinated efforts to expand the National Ocean Service's contribution to coastal urban renewal, or brownfields, redevelopment efforts by linking NOAA services with communities in need. For example, NOAA is sampling fish in southeast Alaska for potential contamination because the community of Metlakatla is worried about the effects of pollution on its residents.

"Matta's strengths," Fritz said, "lie in her unwavering focus on the agency mission and her ability to achieve lasting consensus among diverse parties and perspectives. Besides her valuable contributions to NOAA programs, she serves as an excellent spokesperson for NOAA and is an inspiration and leader to her peers."

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Address comments to:
Editor, The NOAA Report
1315 East-West Highway
SSMC3, room 10853
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-713-9042 *(voice)*
301-713-9049 *(fax)*
Email: dane.konop@noaa.gov
NOAA Report Online: *http://www.publicaffairs.noaa.gov/nr*
Jordan St. John, director, OPCA
Dane Konop, editor

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