



## LESSONS WE CAN LEARN TODAY FROM PAST HURRICANES

The meteorology team from WINK News, The Weather Authority, looks back on powerful storms from previous seasons.

It's been nearly 30 years since Hurricane Andrew slammed into Florida's east coast as a Category 5 storm, yet the havoc it sparked is still fresh in the memories of the people who lived through it.

This is often the case with those who've experienced major storms, and meteorologists Jim Farrell, Matt Devitt, KC Sherman and Brittany Van Voorhees at WINK News, The Weather Authority, are no exceptions. The crew can pinpoint how the hurricanes that had the greatest impact on them now help influence how they forecast future storms. Here, they share the names of those powerful systems and the greatest takeaways from each, in the hopes that Floridians will heed the same call to safety and preparedness.

With 40 years of forecasting experience, WINK News Chief Meteorologist Jim Farrell has guided Southwest Florida through dozens of major storms, but there are two that have stayed with him: Hurricane Charley in 2004 and Hurricane Irma in 2017.

Sixteen years later, Farrell recalls Charley's forecast down to the smallest details. "Everybody in Florida—let alone Southwest Florida—went to bed Thursday night, Aug. 12, thinking that Charley would be a powerful hurricane, but most likely would stay offshore and head more towards the Tam-

pa Bay area," he says. "We woke up early Friday morning and it became obvious to us early in the day that it was turning in now, taking on a course that would not take it to Tampa, but would take it into Southwest Florida."

Indeed, Charley veered into Punta Gorda as a Category 4 storm, destroying thousands of homes in Lee and Charlotte Counties. An assessment published in 2006 by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration estimated that Charley caused more than \$14 billion in damage and 10 fatalities. In addition to the change in direction, Charley also increased in intensity before making landfall—rare for hurricanes, which usually weaken as they approach land.

Charley's shift in direction and wind speed shattered the original expectations for the storm. Subsequently, Farrell determined that

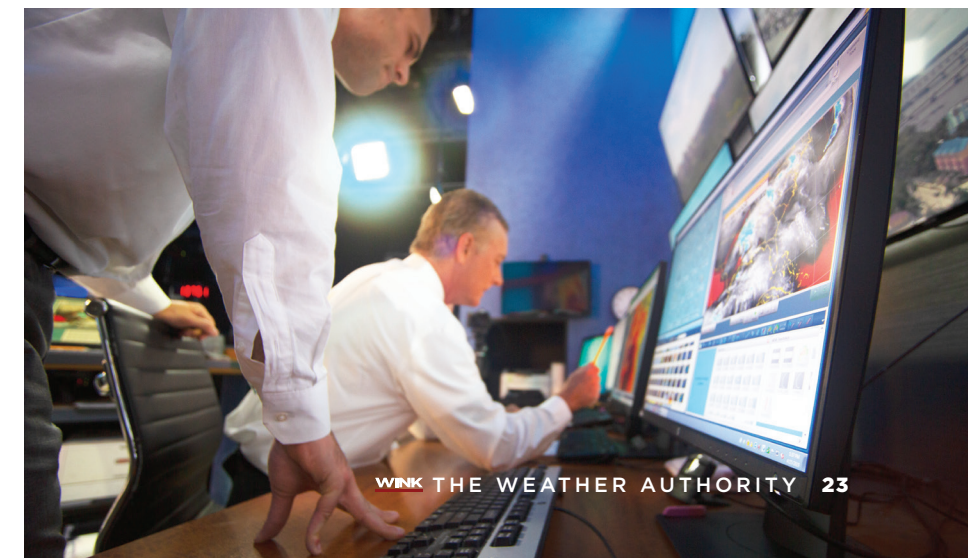
everyone must be on guard, monitoring a storm's movements and preparing to react if the forecast abruptly changes.

"Evacuations were underway or evacuations had been completed, but some people did not heed the evacuations and were fortunately able to evacuate at the last minute, early on Friday morning," he says. "It's a situation where everybody needs to be aware that you just have to watch these until they pass by and start moving away."

Unlike Charley, Hurricane Irma followed the path projected for it from the start. But its sheer size, a diameter of between 400 and 500 miles, walloped several counties across the entire state.

"The forecast track for Irma was always from south to north, so we knew that no matter where it was in South Florida, it was going to affect every single county itself," Farrell recalls.

He believes that under the circumstances, Florida residents reacted in the best way they could. "We were telling them for days that this was a major hurricane that potentially was going to come right into South Florida—it did," he says. "And it really didn't have any surprises. It was just very impactful because of its track and strength and structure."





Hurricane Matthew in 2016 proved that a Category 1 storm can still wallop a region, leaving widespread destruction and a long recovery period. Van Voorhees recalls that Matthew was projected to hit Florida's east coast, but steering currents held it offshore until it reached just south of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, where she was working at the time.

"The problem with the Myrtle Beach area," she says, "a lot of folks who don't live close to the beach and live inland are more low-income housing. They have really bad flooding problems."

According to the National Weather Service, the storm surge flooding caused by Hurricane Matthew in Charleston, South Carolina, was gauged as the third highest in the area's history, after Hurricane Hugo in 1989 and an unnamed hurricane in 1940. Most areas averaged a foot of rainfall and more than hundreds of millions of dollars in damage. Several people died after being trapped or swept away by floodwaters.

KC Sherman recalls the destructive effects that last year's Hurricane Dorian had on the coast of North Carolina, where she was a meteorologist for three years prior to joining WINK News, The

Weather Authority. After wreaking havoc in the Bahamas, Dorian taunted Florida with its slow crawl up the east coast, but began to generate damage again once it reached North Carolina.

Dorian was a Category 1 as its outer bands swept over the coast of North Carolina on Friday, Sept. 6. From the moment the storm arrived in the coastal zones around 5 a.m., tornado warnings began springing up, one after the other, in rapid succession.

"Another meteorologist and I, we did literally wall-to-wall coverage from 5 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon," Sherman says.

After making landfall, winds from the storm began to push the water from Pamlico Sound onto the Outer Banks. There was severe flooding, to the point that many of those who did not evacuate climbed into their attics to avoid the rising water, according to *The New York Times*. The storm killed three in the state.

Farrell says he tells Southwest Floridians the same thing every year—no matter what the current outlook for the hurricane season is, preparation is key, and WINK News, The Weather Authority, will provide the information necessary to keep everyone safe. [w](#)

Ultimately, Farrell took an identical approach with Irma as he did with Charley, monitoring the hurricane from its formation until it broke up, in case the track changed unexpectedly. He urges Southwest Floridians to do the same with every hurricane—to keep their sights on it until it has completely passed.

"I treat every hurricane as a unique weather system," Farrell says. "You can't say 'Because Charley did this or Katrina did that, it's going to do this.' You have to analyze everything from the ground up."

While Irma was barreling to-

ward Florida, Matt Devitt was occupied with trying to scale down the fear that had spread among Southwest Floridians.

"Irma to me was a memorable storm because of the fact that there was so much buildup to the storm before it made landfall—we tracked this from Africa," Devitt says. "We had a lot of time to watch it, but it caused a lot of stress and anxiety."

Devitt explains that while Irma was approaching, people worried about a dramatic storm surge and the conflicting hurricane models making news. Because of his

experience with past hurricanes, Devitt could better anticipate the next stage of the storm and directed that knowledge toward easing the community's anxiety.

When he wasn't reporting on air, he was updating the public on the latest hurricane conditions through Twitter and Facebook during the early hours of the morning and evening. "I was a voice of calm and reassurance: 'If you do this and this and this, you're going to be OK,'" he says of his tech updates. "That's why I was able to help people; I kept them safe."

Anna Gumsel/Inman

Devitt hopes to continue emphasizing the importance of maintaining a positive outlook and not panicking. He says people can best prepare by following the steps laid out by news and emergency agencies.

"One thing I remember about Irma, during the storm, is how the seconds feel like minutes and the minutes feel like hours," he says. "I told people they should conserve their power and stay calm and keep positive. Distract yourself, play games and spend time with family. Make the best of it."

For Brittany Van Voorhees,

