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# A day in the life of a - surf forecaster

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*By Maggie Miles Correspondent August 20, 2021 Publication: Virginian-Pilot, The (Norfolk, VA) Page: 14E Word Count: 1291*

Kurt Korte, our favorite local surfcaster - or shall we call him our favorite OLYMPIAN surfcaster - just got back from Tokyo, where he was surfcasting for the first ever Olympic surf competition. In fact, the New York Times calls him "Olympic surfing's wave whisperer." But we were curious - what's a normal day in the life like for Surflife's director of Atlantic forecasting here on the Outer Banks?

According to their website, every day, hundreds of thousands of people around the world depend on Surflife to "enrich their experiences in and around the ocean." Or, in other words, to get good waves. But how do they do it?

"It's actually kind of crazy," says Korte. "You think about the idea of the surf bum that rolls out of bed, blows off work and goes and surfs - it's definitely not that," he laughs. According to Korte, it's a whole global network of over 100 highly experienced professionals, international offices in Huntington Beach, Australia, and the United Kingdom, contractors spread out across the world, thousands of monitored cameras, and over 20 years of immaculately kept observational data on ocean, swell and weather patterns that you can't find anywhere else.

According to Korte, his day starts well before sunrise. At this time of year, that means around 5:15 to 5:30 a.m. At other times of year, that could mean even earlier.

He gets out of bed, grabs a coffee, and heads to his office, his home office that is. They usually have an office in Nags Head that he would get to eventually, but like many of us, for now they are working at home.

The first thing he does is go to his computer, pull up Surfline, and look at the different cameras they have streaming across the East Coast. For the Outer Banks they have around 30 cameras placed from Duck to Frisco, but he usually covers areas from Virginia Beach, where he's from, to areas in South Carolina. He also takes a look at the wind observations and the buoy observations. According to Korte, we have a great buoy network off our coast here.

"Basically, because I surf, and because weather is pretty much my life, I always kind of know what's going on and always have a good idea of the general patterns of the place and how much surf we're going to have."

But Korte uses all of that information to see what the ocean is doing, how much swell is out there, what the swell tide is, what the swell period is, swell direction, the different types of swell in the water,

and starts to formulate an idea of what that means for surfing. Then he starts writing his daily morning surf reports for Surfline's website. Korte writes a different report not only for each of their 30 something spots on the Outer Banks, but for a good chunk of the East Coast.

Surflines puts out these reports two times a day, every day, 365 days a year, no matter what. If it's not Korte writing the report, it's our other favorite surfcaster Rob Mitstifer, lead forecaster at Surflines. On the Outer Banks they have a team of three: Korte, Mitstifer, and a camera crewman.

Next, Korte writes the short-term forecast, which is basically the forecast for the rest of the day. Will it get bigger? Will it get smaller? Will the tide help, or will it hurt? When is high tide? What is the wind going to do? Their goal is to find windows of the biggest surf and the cleanest surf, and help their users decide when they want to go surfing.

This information is really helpful to users on the Outer Banks, because here things can change rapidly. According to Korte, there are a lot of crazy weather patterns that are unique to the Outer Banks. He tells about a day recently that was a perfect example of just how dynamic weather here can be. The day started with strong onshore winds, and then there was about an hour in the morning where the conditions were pretty good, and it was clean, and then the wind came back up and it was blown out again.

"So on a day like that my job is to help people take advantage of that one hour," says Korte.

The rest of the day is spent looking at wind, weather and swell models. Korte uses a swell model that Surflines itself created, called LOTUS. He uses information from that to formulate and update Surflines's seven-day surf forecasts for the East Coast, which he also updates daily.

But, he doesn't just sit behind a computer all day, he gets out into the elements too. According to Korte, no matter how reliable a camera is, nothing replaces going to look at it yourself. He gets out on the beach to observe the surf and the weather patterns each day, but especially for significant events like a hurricane swell or a nor'easter - for his forecasts, and also for his own

personal self intrigue.

And he does this without the use of any tools or contraptions. He can do this solely with the expertise of his own eye.

"I've been surfing since I was 16, so I kind of just know what I'm looking at," says Korte. He also has a master's degree in meteorology from N.C. State. "So, it's about combining that classroom work with that personal experience."

After he finishes updating the seven-day forecasts, he writes the afternoon surf report, which they also do every day, 365 days a year, where he'll update anything that has changed since the morning. In between all of those things, Korte says he may have meetings with other forecasters, he may have a consultation with a professional surfer or two, or he may even be talking to the media if there is some kind of significant weather event going on. Korte says that if there is a significant swell going on around the globe, either Korte or one of the other surfcasters know everything about it. According to Korte, that's the kind of stuff surf meteorologists love to nerd out on.

But the real question is, does Korte get to get out in the water to take advantage of the good waves he predicts?

"It's definitely encouraged," says Korte.

In fact, according to Korte, at Surfline they consider it an essential part of the job.

"We always joke, 'You have to validate your forecast,' he says.

According to Korte, they never end a meeting without asking each other if they got to surf. Even after the Olympics he said his coworkers would say, "How was the Olympics? Get to surf?" (He did.)

He feels fortunate to work at a place where they are so passionate about enjoying the lifestyle. He says even the CEO will say, "You didn't surf? What do you mean you didn't surf?!"

But his favorite part of the job is getting to help other people enjoy the waves. He loves sitting in front of a challenging forecast, and being able to use his experience to see through the complications of the weather to produce a really good forecast.

"Just the idea that I can use my experience to help people get waves," says Korte. "Because people are always happy when they get waves. Think about after a good day of waves on the beach here - everyone is happy. Positivity is just oozing out of everyone, so helping people to take advantage of that is probably my favorite part."

"And hey, if I get to get a little sample of it, that's great, too," he grins.

Kurt Korte, Director of Atlantic Forecasting for Surfline, "does a little forecast verification" at the Tsurigasaki Surfing Beach in Ichinomiya, Japan, during the 2020 Summer Olympics. Sean Evans/ISA Kurt Korte of Surfline at the surfing contest site in Ichinomiya, Japan. The Olympics debuted surfing this year at the Tokyo 2020 Games. Sean Evans/ISA

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