

Millersville University grad facing the storm

Meteorologist gave emergency officials in Texas the information they needed to make the call to evacuate

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When the mayor of Victoria, Texas, ordered residents to evacuate in the wake of Hurricane Harvey on Thursday, Greg Heavener was there to represent the National Weather Service and give the latest forecasts.

The Millersville University graduate has lived in Corpus Christi, Texas, and worked for the weather service's station there for two years. When Harvey started to make its way to the Texas coast, Heavener was sent to Victoria, a city about 50 miles north of Corpus Christi, to provide updates to the emergency operation center there.

"When I arrived Thursday, I briefed the mayor, city manager, county judge. ... Based off the briefing, they issued a mandatory evacuation," Heavener said in a phone call Tuesday. "We never tell them what to do. We give them information that they need to make decisions."

Before going to Victoria, Heavener sent his wife and kids to San Antonio and boarded up his house.

"Watching (the storm) roll in Friday evening was devastating. It was a horrific event," Heavener said. "It's really hard to find all the emotions going through your head knowing it could impact you personally or people you know."

The eye of the storm passed south of Victoria, but the city still experienced wind gusts over 90 mph and lots of rain, he said.

Throughout the weekend, Heavener worked 18 to 20 hours a day to keep emergency officials updated before being relieved of his post Monday.

Heavener graduated from MU in 2006 with a bachelor's degree in meteorology. He grew up outside Baltimore and chose the college because he "liked the look and feel of the school."

Heavener's resume includes a stint in New Jersey, where he was on the front lines of tracking Hurricane Sandy in 2012, an experience that helped prepare him for Hurricane Harvey.

Meteorologist Eric Horst, who directs MU's Weather Information Center, said Monday he's been following updates from Heavener.

"It's cool to follow and see what our graduates are contributing to the forecast," Horst said.

Horst said another MU grad, Bob Van Dillen, is a meteorologist with HLN cable network in Atlanta, and was sent to report from Houston on Monday.

Van Dillen, a member of the class of 1995, didn't respond to a request for comment, but he posted a video of a live shot from Houston on his Twitter account Monday.

"It does grab your interest here at Millersville to say, 'Some of our products of this program have boots on the ground and are helping in their own way,'" Horst said.



Greg Heavener, right, briefs a group of emergency officials about Hurricane Harvey on Saturday in Victoria, Texas.
GREG HEAVENER