



PHIL SEARS/Democrat

Meredith Field, with the Center for Ocean-Atmospheric Prediction Studies, shows Alexis Martinez, 11, how much water was collected in a rain gauge after he threw a water balloon towards a board of nails above it during the National Weather Service and Florida State University Department of Meteorology's Weather Fest on Saturday.

Weather Fest offers up some low pressure fun

By Nic Corbett
DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

TALLAHASSEE.COM

The first-ever Weather Fest drew hundreds of people who toured the National Weather Service's Tallahassee office on Florida State University's campus and watched weather balloons go up into the air.

"It's mainly to bring awareness to the public," said Kim Bradbury, president of the north Florida chapter of the American Meteorological Society, which organized the event with NWS. "We really wanted to do some outreach."

Kelly Godsey, a meteorologist with the Weather Service, said part of the goal was to communicate to the public what his agency does to keep them safe during a natural disaster.

"Weather is something people have an interest in from when they're a

■ Check out a video and photo gallery from the Weather Fest.

child," said Kelly Godsey, a meteorologist. "I got into it as a hobby when I was 8 years old."

On a typical day, the Weather Service sends up a weather balloon twice, at 6 a.m. and 6 p.m., timed to coincide with the release of other balloons across the globe. Inside the balloon is a radiosonde, an instrument that collects data as the balloon rises in the sky. It measures temperature, wind speed and direction, humidity and pressure at all levels of the atmosphere.

"All that information feeds into our computer models," he said. "Without this data, it would be difficult to predict what the weather will be like in three, five or seven days."

The balloon expands as it rises in the atmosphere, and the pressure drops until it is the size of a double-wide mobile home.

Then, it pops and falls to the ground. Text on the shell of the instrument reads: "harmless weather instrument." Godsey said bomb squads have been sent out when the instrument lands in an unsuspecting person's backyard.

"A couple of them have been blown up because of that," he said.

Jeff Walker came to Weather Fest with his children, Caroline, 13, and Scott, 9, who enjoyed seeing the balloon's launch room, where the balloon gets filled with helium.

"I actually graduated from (the FSU meteorology program) in 1987," Walker said, "and I wanted my kids to see it."

■ Contact reporter Nic Corbett at (850) 599-2161 or ncorbett@tallahassee.com.