

'POLAR VORTEX' ON ITS WAY

KELLY SONNENBURG OF HALTON-BASED THE WEATHER NETWORK SAYS AREA RESIDENTS SHOULD BRACE THEMSELVES FOR AN ESPECIALLY COLD, ACTIVE WINTER

With this weekend marking winter's official arrival, Metroland Halton caught up with local video meteorologist Kelly Sonnenburg, who shared a forecast for the season ahead, as well as what led her to the field and what she loves about her job.

WHAT ARE WE IN FOR OVERALL THIS WINTER?

This winter will feature an abundance of cold and active weather across southern Ontario. While the season has already started off with a bang, this is just a preview of what much of the winter season will look like. Extended periods of severe cold will lock in across the Great Lakes, and the term 'polar vortex' will get used several times this winter. An active storm track is forecast to be a dominant pattern this season, which could bring above-normal snow totals to much of the region.

WHAT LED YOU TO A CAREER AS A METEOROLOGIST?

I've wanted to become a meteorologist since I was very young. I grew up in a small town along the shores of Lake Huron, which gave a perfect viewing spot for summertime thunderstorms rolling in off the lake and howling snow squalls during the winter. I specifically remember one winter we had so much snow on our front lawn we could walk over the top of our van in the driveway. The wild weather extremes really piqued my interest when I was in elementary school and I decided that I wanted to become a meteorologist, and it stuck!

DO YOU FEEL THERE'S MORE EXPECTED FROM THOSE WHO FORECAST THE WEATHER NOWADAYS, AND IF SO TO YOU TAKE PRIDE IN THAT FACT OR SEE IT AS ADDED PRESSURE?

I am fairly new in the field, so I can't speak to if pressure has built for other forecasters, but I do know that weather information is so much more readily available for people nowadays. That can make it more challenging for meteorologists to keep forecasts updated and as accurate as possible. It makes us more accountable for local, real-time forecasting, which can sometimes create more pressure, but also make it more exciting.

WHAT'S THE MOST CHALLENGING OR GRATIFYING ASPECT OF YOUR PROFESSION?

I sometimes find what can be most difficult is delivering the story in a coherent and informative way that is still digestible for our viewers. I want them to know how this weather forecast will impact their day to day lives and if needed, know how to make adjustments based on the forecast. Part of our job is to keep people safe, and days when we have severe weather and tornado warnings are some of the most gratifying days. Knowing that we have hopefully kept people safe can be the most rewarding after a long day of storm tracking.

Do you have an especially memorable story of tracking a winter storm?

Lake effect snow squalls are one of my favourite types of winter weather to

5 WILD FACTS ABOUT WINTER IN CANADA

- 1. Can you say Snowmageddon?**
The record for the most amount of snowfall in a 24-hour day in Canada is in Tahtsa Lake, B.C. in 1999 - with a mind-blowing 145 centimetres.
- 2. In winter,** Ottawa's Rideau Canal becomes the world's largest ice rink, with a surface equal to 90 Olympic skating rinks.
- 3. Yikes!** The lowest recorded temperature ever in Canada was bone-chilling -63 C on Feb. 3, 1947 in Snag, Yukon.
- 4. British Columbia** is a land of extremes when it comes to snowfall. Both the snowiest and least snow spots in Canada are both found in southern B.C. On average, Victoria only gets 33 cm of snow each winter, while Mount Fidelity in Glacier National Park gets a whopping 1,388 cm.
- 5. Last winter** a couple in St. Adolphe, Man. set the Guinness World Record for the biggest snow maze, which measured 30,021 square feet. It took three weeks for their team to build and cost \$42,676.

track. I find it incredibly fascinating how localized a snow squall can be but how powerful and crippling it can be on roads and communities. Some can produce over 50 centimetres in just a few hours. It takes the perfect atmospheric setup to produce such a mesmerizing, pronounced image on radar that I could watch for hours.

DO YOU EVER HAVE A "DON'T SHOOT THE MESSENGER" MINDSET WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS DURING A NASTY STRETCH OF WINTER WEATHER?

Ha ha! I am used to my friends and family bugging me when the weather may not be looking in their favour for an outdoor event or activity they have planned, especially my dad with his golf game. But I have taught them a lot about forecasting and the challenges in produc-



The Weather Network photo Kelly Sonnenburg of The Weather Network says Halton residents should expect an especially cold and active winter.

ing a forecast, so they understand and give me a break.

Kelly Sonnenburg has been working as a meteorologist for The Weather Network since 2014. She

has hosted the national morning show, weather segments for CBC News Network and was The Weather Network's severe weather specialist for a summer live tracking storms on radar across the

country. She has also reported on tornado damage in the field and hosted and produced in depth science segments. Currently, Kelly is working as a video meteorologist and video and editorial lead