

Below the lighted screen, Peter Boulay, a 1996 EAS graduate employed by the Minnesota State Office of Climatology, talks about the Halloween Blizzard of 1991. Beside him, Sven Sundgaard, a 2003 EAS graduate employed by KARE-11 TV, waits his turn to talk about the same storm.

Conference takes participants by storm



Most people talk about the weather as a prelude to other topics. But if you're a meteorologist, talking about the weather is serious work.

So when Melinda Albrecht, who works for the National Weather Service in Aberdeen, S.D., attended the first Northern Plains Winter Storm Conference, she came prepared to talk and to listen.

"There usually are very big weather events that are fascinating to hear about both as a meteorologist and a general weather enthusiast," said Albrecht, adding she tries to attend at least one weather conference a year.

"There are sometimes lessons learned from good forecasts gone right, and others lean toward improvements in forecasting techniques," she said.

A project of the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences (EAS), the Northern Plains Winter Storm Conference was launched Oct. 25-26, 2006 at the Americana Inn and Conference Center in St. Cloud.

Plans are already underway for the second annual conference, said Rodney Kubesh, assistant professor in EAS, who spear-



Eric Kurth, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Rapid City, S.D., explains how a December 2005 "compact" winter storm was not well forecast and arrived, unfortunately, during peak hours of morning travel in the Rapid City area.

headed the conference with the support of the department.

Albrecht joined more than a dozen meteorology professionals who gave presentations at the conference. Hers included a study of the precipitation physics observed Nov. 26-28, 2005, during the winter storm that lashed the eastern Dakotas and western Minnesota with high winds and freezing rain, bringing down approximately 10,000 miles of transmission line and 8,000 utility poles and leaving 50,000 people without electricity — some for nearly three weeks.

Albrecht said highlights of the conference included Dan Baumgardt, from the National Weather Service (NWS) in LaCrosse, Wis., whose keynote address, "The Migration of Meteorology from Theory to Daily NWS Forecasting: A 15-year Perspective" outlined changes in the NWS, past and future.

"I also enjoyed the exploratory presentations that could lead to better operational guidelines in forecasting and observational data," she said of "Snow Modeling and Observation at the National Operational Hydrologic Remote Sensing Center" by Chris Bovitz, who works at the center in Chanhausen, Minn.; and "Some Preliminary Ideas on Forecasting Ceiling and Visibility in Snow Using WSR-88D" by Richard Naistat, of the NWS in Chanhausen.

Albrecht said the Northern Plains Winter Storm Conference and other regional conferences are extremely valuable in that they keep weather professionals informed of the research providing new techniques and improvement in the understanding of the atmosphere because incorporating these into operational meteorology can be difficult.

"There is new radar technology being developed that will create challenges in operations through changes in radar interpretation techniques. There are continued software updates and changes. Right now the whole field is in a state of flux while most weather agencies upgrade to more 'graphical-based' products compared to the 'text-based' products of the past few decades," she said.