

AUGUST 2023

# Niskayuna NEIGHBORS



MATT MACKIE—  
*Looking to the Skies*



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# MATT MACKIE— *Looking to the Skies*



BY JENNA CAPUTO | PHOTOS BY MARY FLORES PHOTOGRAPHY & CONTRIBUTED BY MATT MACKIE

As a meteorologist at WTEN, Matt Mackie starts his day early—like at 2 AM early. He gets ready and goes through the weather data at home before arriving at the station by 4:00 to add in graphics and final touches to the forecast before hitting the air by 6 AM.

Matt has been fascinated with the weather since he was a kid growing up in Bethesda, Maryland. He lived in a walkable neighborhood close to all his friends and right around the corner from Washington, DC. “DC is an incredible city. I loved being surrounded by history everywhere I went,” he says. Bethesda was a great place to experience all kinds of

weather. They got a little snow in the winter, heat and humidity in the summer, and even sometimes experienced hurricanes and tropical storms. “I remember specifically losing power during Hurricane Isabel in 2003, when I was in elementary school,” says Matt. “Everything about the storm—the wind and rain—fascinated me. Then a couple of years later in middle school, we spent a month plotting hurricanes on a map as they crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and ever since then, I was hooked.”

Matt studied meteorology at Florida State University. Since he started his professional study, he’s been through three hurricanes. While



still in school, Hurricane Hermine passed directly over Tallahassee. The school canceled classes, businesses shut down, and most of the student body left town. But Matt and many of the other meteorology students stayed and studied the storm from the campus TV studio. During the two years at his first on-air job in Macon, GA, Hurricanes Irma and Michael came through. Michael knocked their sister station in Albany, Georgia off the air, so Matt spent much of the evening doing forecasts for them remotely. “Now I can say I’ve been on air in both Albanys!” he jokes.

Matt’s work often takes him out of the studio as well. In addition to reporting in the field for events or to track storms across the region, Matt also has experience working as a news reporter. He especially remembers a story at his first station about using controlled burns to prevent out-of-control wildfires. He met with a local forest ranger as they shot incredible footage of the ranger setting up a burn for an entire parcel of the forest to get rid of grass, leaves, brush, and debris in a controlled setting.

Then Halloween 2019 struck with the massive storms and rains that hit here in the Capital District. A major portion of the Southern Adirondacks received over five inches of rain in 24 hours, leading to many dangerous flash floods. “I was one of our three meteorologists on staff that evening, and I remember seeing the warnings and alerts being issued in quick succession by the National Weather Service. I ended up grabbing a couple hours of sleep in a conference room at the station that night, then heading out at 2 or 3 AM in the Mobile Storm Tracker vehicle with one of our photographers to cover the flooding over in Herkimer County. We ended up in Dolgeville, which was among the area’s most affected, with washed-out roads and water rescues needed. Unfortunately, there was one fatality during the floods. I will never forget the power of the amount of water rushing through those tiny creeks, making them look like white water rapids. Seeing the effects of a storm like that on the ground—in person—is far different than watching it on the radar, and it gave me a new perspective on the job,” remembers Matt.

Matt also often visits schools and science programs with WTEN’s Mobile Storm Tracker Vehicle. Since his love of weather started in the elementary and middle years, he loves working with students of that age and hopes to encourage some of them to become part of the next generation of meteorologists. One thing many are surprised to learn? TV meteorologists ad-lib their forecasts with no script or teleprompter. “If you hear the occasional awkward pause in the weather report, that’s me trying to think of what to say next!” he says. Matt holds the Certified Broadcast Meteorologist (CBM) designation from the American Meteorological Society. This honor is received after taking a test and having your forecasts evaluated by a panel of other meteorologists.

In addition to weather, Matt loves the outdoors in general as well. He is an avid hiker, stemming from his favorite book as a kid, *My Side of the Mountain*, by Jean Craighead George. The story follows a runaway boy who attempts to live on his own in the Catskill Mountains. “When I moved up here for work and found myself only an hour away, I had to go check out the mountains for myself!” he says. He started with Slide Mountain—the tallest in the Catskills. Not used to big hikes, it knocked him out, but the forest was beautiful and the views breathtaking. He was hooked and ready for more. He has since hiked all 33 of the Catskill High Peaks required to join the Catskill 3500 Club. He did them again

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in the winter to become a winter member as well. "I actually prefer hiking in the snow," he says. "If you are prepared and have the right equipment to do it safely, it is a magical experience. And the frosty temperatures keep you cool!" He has also hiked the entire Taconic Crest Trail along the NY/MA/VT border and completed the Lake George 12ster Challenge. He's now working on becoming an Adirondack 46er next.

Matt also loves to travel. His most memorable trip was the year he lived in Valencia, Spain for a study abroad program through Florida State. "I had the time of my life!" says Matt. "It was

right on the ocean, had orange trees lining the streets, and the architecture was incredible. The cathedral there dates back to the 1200s! It is Spain's third biggest city, but I found it attracted far fewer tourists than Madrid or Barcelona. I found it great to be a little off the beaten path in that regard. I met new people, tried new foods, learned about a new and different culture." While there, he toured around Europe, taking advantage of the cheaper travel options and hostels to visit England, Scotland, Germany, Italy, Croatia, Malta, and Ireland. The trip to Ireland was a special bike tour he took with two friends from the program. They spent a few days biking the Ring of Kerry on the southwest coast. "It was incredibly beautiful, even though it rained almost the whole time. Of course I, the meteorology student, would have bad weather, but we made the most of it." The other memorable part about his trip to Europe was meeting his now wife, Rachael. Also a student in the program, Rachael hailed from Delaware. "My family actually vacationed at beach towns not far from where she grew up," says Matt, "but we had to go all the way to Europe to meet each other."

Now married, the couple initially lived along Washington Park in Albany for a couple of years but have now moved to the suburbs. Rachael is a therapist, and they're hoping to adopt a dog one day soon. In the meantime, they enjoy hiking and traveling together, often taking weekend trips to the Adirondacks. When Matt isn't catching up on his sleep, he also loves to kayak and spend time outdoors in addition to exploring the historical sites in our area. "Upstate NY is a great place to be a history lover!" he says.

He lives by the mantra of "Be kind," and is looking forward to settling in to their new community and becoming more involved in the area. When looking to the future, Matt wishes for "a long, healthy life, a strong marriage, and to make a difference in the on-air work that I do. It means the world to me that people enjoy my on-air work enough to tune in on a regular basis and make my weather reports a part of their routine. I'm very lucky to be able to do what I love for a living. None of it is possible without the viewers, and I'm so grateful for the run I've had so far." 🐾



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