



# For him, disasters are old hat

## McCraw: Thousands follow his forecasts

Continued from Page C1

Craw grew up in Lincoln City and had recently lost her brother, a deputy with the Tillamook County sheriff's office, in a motorcycle accident.

"She came back here for the funeral," Gordon McCraw says. "She met (Tillamook County sheriff) Todd Anderson, and Todd made the mistake of telling her, 'If there is anything I can ever do for you, let me know.'"

Then, as fate would have it, Anderson traveled to Louisiana for a post-Katrina conference.

"I ended up meeting with Gordon and basically stole him," Anderson says. "I cherry-picked him. His firsthand experience is a huge plus. He had already had the opportunity to see in a catastrophe what worked and what went wrong."

Now it's McCraw's job to try to make sure as little as possible goes wrong when disaster strikes Tillamook. He's responsible for planning, organizing

and directing all emergency management services. It's a role that occupies him daily and not only in the traditional ways.

A former meteorologist, McCraw has an email list of 2,000 to 3,000 people who receive his weather updates daily.

"Gordon's Tillamook Weather Center" on Facebook has been "liked" by 1,025 friends at last count and he's on Twitter, too.

He uses the networks to post everything from information that might simply make for a better drive, to news that could save a life. He also gives emergency preparedness talks around the county, keeps track of the county's 32 tsunami sirens and, when disaster hits close, he's the go-to guy for pretty much everything that matters.

### Quick response

Seconds after the earthquake rocked Japan last month, McCraw began receiving quake and tsunami alerts on his cellphone. Within 30 minutes, the phone was buzzing with calls from radio and TV reporters looking for interviews; and within an hour, he had activated the Incident Command Team. Reverse 9-1-1 calls went out to 6,900 people and the team evacuated homes countywide that were within a half-mile of the beach.

There was a lot that went

right that day, and some that left McCraw frustrated.

"One of the fire chiefs went down and had a talk with a car on the beach that had a family in it. He asked if they were aware of the threat of the tsunami. The driver said he heard something about it over in the valley, but it was such a beautiful day they decided to come to the beach."

McCraw would like to think Katrina was his last major disaster, but he spends his time planning otherwise. And that involves, in his own words, doing his best to put a little fear in people about the possibility of a Cascadia zone earthquake occurring.

"If that one hits, that's going to make Katrina look like a mild winter storm," he says. "When you consider that Japan was one of the most earthquake-ready nations in the world and you see what they are going through. Call me skeptical, but after Katrina, I don't know that the government is ready for that. Or could even get ready."

"How do you cope with devastation from Vancouver to California? People get scared. And so in all my talks, I give them the bad news. I tell them my job is to scare you, and if I didn't scare you, then I didn't do my job."

Lori Tobias 541-265-9394;  
loritobias@aol.com



BRIAN FEULNER/THE OREGONIAN

Gordon McCraw is the emergency management director for Tillamook County, which has suffered 13 federally declared natural disasters since 1955 — five since 2006, when McCraw joined the sheriff's department and got involved with disaster management.

## Gordon McCraw, who's been through hurricanes and a big quake, is the man to turn to during Tillamook County emergencies

By LORI TOBIAS | THE OREGONIAN

TILLAMOOK — Either Gordon McCraw's got a lousy sense of timing, or Mother Nature's got a bull's-eye on his back. Any way you look at it, the director of Tillamook County Emergency Management has seen a lot of disaster.

"Some people say I am a magnet," said McCraw, chuckling. "My story, and I'm sticking with it, is that God has decided I need to be in Tillamook for some reason, and he gave me all this disaster experience to put to use here."

And, boy, is it needed. Since 1955, Tillamook County has suffered 13 federally declared natural disasters, including five since 2006, when McCraw joined the sheriff's department and got involved with disaster management.

"I did the weather briefing for the first hurricane-force wind warning here," McCraw says. "I said, 'How ironic is it that the guy who was run out of Louisiana by a hurricane is here briefing the very first hurricane-force wind warning?' I came to Tillamook to get away from high winds and floods. I guess I needed to do a little more research."

McCraw's numerous brushes with disaster date from 1969 when Category 5 Hurricane Camille struck while he was visiting Louisiana.

"It was my first experience of hearing wood crack and I didn't like that," McCraw recalls. "When the wind gets that strong and starts buffeting your house, you can hear it. It's a unique sound you don't forget."



To see a video of Gordon McCraw, and to read The Oregonian's ongoing coverage of Japan's earthquakes and tsunami, go to [oregonlive.com/northwest](http://oregonlive.com/northwest).

He was in the Navy in 1989 in Alameda, Calif., when the 7.2 earthquake rocked the area, and three years later he was stationed in Louisiana when Andrew, also a Category 5 hurricane, swept in.

And then came the big one: Katrina. McCraw, now 57, was working as a police officer in New Orleans when that one hit.

"It's the eeriest thing in the world to be in a city bigger than Portland and there is no electricity anywhere," McCraw says. "No lights. No nothing. It's not like anything that anybody's ever experienced. I heard on the police radio one New Orleans police officer found a dead body and called

it in. He wanted to know what he should do. Should he wait there for the coroner to take the body? They said, 'Tag it and move on, there are no coroners.'"

A month passed before McCraw's wife, Heidi, could return home from the evacuation site, and it didn't take long for talk to turn to Oregon. Heidi Mc-

Please see **McCRAW**, Page C7

