



The Four Winds

National Weather Service Employees Organization

NWSEO MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Meet NWSEO Lifetime Member Carolyn (Gurney) Willis

(June 21, 2021) Please meet NWSEO Lifetime Member, **Carolyn Willis**. Carolyn retired after a 40-year career with the NWS, and now resides in Tulsa, OK. She reflects on her time as a member of NWSEO, which began in the mid-80s.

When did you join NWSEO? Describe your active involvement at that time.

I joined NWSEO in the mid-1980s when I worked as a meteorological technician at the Weather Service Office (WSO) in Colorado Springs, CO. *Martin Lee* was the NWSEO Central Region Chairperson. He encouraged me to be a part of the NWSEO and be one of several members who reviewed Central Region Regional Operations Manual Letters (ROMLs) before they were implemented in the field. I joined to contribute in that way. That evolved into being asked to be the NWSEO representative on many NOAA and NWS teams, such as the NOAA Equal Employment Opportunity Council, the NOAA Persons with Disabilities Subcommittee, and the NWS Diversity Council. I served as NWSEO representative on other national teams, such as the "HMT Issues Team" which came up with ideas on how to best utilize HMTs in the new, modernized NWS, such as cross-training them as forecasters. I was also the NWSEO representative on the Cooperative Network Station Service Accountability (CSSA) Rewrite Team which updated and modernized the old software program used to keep track of station siting, equipment, installation, repairs and observer information. It is now known as the Station Information System (SIS). In 1996, I was asked to serve on the Baseline Proficiency Standards Teams which were being formed by management to come up with ways to rate performance of NWS employees, beyond what was already established in the annual performance review. I was on the team which was tasked with coming up with HMT baseline performance standards. In the end, the whole thing was scrapped, as it was impossible to standardize performance nationwide for offices with such diverse duties, responsibilities, and staffing. Also, the NWSEO was not on board with employees being evaluated and rated in that way.

I was also a member of the NWSEO Regional Partnership Council (RPC) in Western Region and was union steward at my last station (Billings, MT.) The most beneficial thing I experienced at the local level was the Local Office Team (LOT).



Photo: Ms. Willis and Dr. Ted Fujita (October 23, 1920 – November 19, 1998), creator of the [Fujita scale](#) of tornado intensity and damage. This photo was taken at the NWS WPM/WCM conference in Miami, FL (1993), where Ms. Willis shared her [Weather Woodles](#) as a tool for Outreach to educators.

What a great way to work with local management and represent the bargaining unit in workplace issues that affect them every workday.

In the mid-90s, I was asked by the NWSEO to become a trained mediator for the NOAA Mediation Cadre. It was being set up as an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) team to give NOAA employees another way to handle workplace problems through mediation. I participated as mediator in several mediations before the cadre was dissolved around 2005 due to lack of funding by NOAA. We didn't mediate our own line offices, so my mediations were for National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and NOAA Corps. It was eye-opening to me to see that other line offices had the same problems between management and their employees as the NWS did.

I am thankful that throughout my career, the NWSEO valued my judgment enough to ask me to serve in positions that affected the work lives of employees then and into the future. I was a NWSEO member for nearly 30 years when I was an NWS employee, and have remained a retiree/associate member since then.

On a personal note, the NWSEO was a great help to me in the mid-2000s when there was a problem regarding the OPL position at my station. The NWSEO filed a national grievance based on my case. I want to say Richard Hirn was amazing, took NWS management to task, and obtained a great settlement for me that really worked out well.

Do you have anything to add about your NWSEO national convention experiences?

Although I did not make it to many conventions, I did attend the 1996 convention in Seattle, 2011 in Minneapolis, and 2012 in Las Vegas. It was great to see old friends and meet new ones, as well as learn about the various ways the NWSEO was working for the bargaining unit employees nationwide. I am hoping to attend the 2021 convention in Las Vegas as a retiree.

Are there some things you'd like to share that might surprise us about you?

I was known in the NWS for years as "The Woodle Woman," as I created the cartoon slideshow "[The Weather Woodles](#)", which has been used by the NWS for outreach since 1980. I was presented with the NOAA Administrator's Award in 1996 for it.

In 1993, I met [Dr. Ted Fujita](#) at a WPM/WCP (Warning Preparedness Meteorologist/Warning Coordination Meteorologist) conference in Miami. I was so excited to meet him that when I shook his hand, I blabbered, "I'm SO GLAD to meet you, Dr. Fajita." He thought it was funny I had called him a fajita and laughed and laughed. I was mortified!

Although I am retired from the NWS, I work part-time for an FAA contractor, augmenting ASOS observations at the Tulsa Airport. It keeps my hand in weather, and for an aviation enthusiast, spending time at an airport isn't work, it is pure joy! I really ENJOY working occasional midnight shifts!

NWSEO recognizes and congratulates *Carolyn Willis* and all of our **Lifetime Members**.

We hope feature stories like this will encourage NWSEO Members to get to know each

other from across the nation, connect even more, and together, support each other in the work of NWSEO and in strengthening our membership.

Please submit your Member Spotlight suggestions and comments to Christy Fox at mediarelations@nwseo.org.

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No one cares more for National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) employees than NOAA employees.

No one works harder for NOAA employees than NOAA employees.

We are NOAA employees. We are NWSEO.

NWSEO proudly represents more NOAA employees than any other Union. NWSEO serves bargaining unit employees of the National Weather Service, NESDIS Office of Satellite and Product Operations, Office of General Counsel, Aircraft Operations Center, and Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory.