

From the studio to the classroom: Paul Piorek continues meteorology career while teaching 5th grade

By [Jarrod Wardwell](#), Staff writer April 11, 2022



Long time television and radio meteorologist Paul Piorek teaches fifth grade at St. Thomas Aquinas School, in Fairfield, Conn. April 3, 2024.
Ned Gerard/Hearst Connecticut Media

FAIRFIELD — Paul Piorek's studio looks a lot different than it did 45 years ago when his meteorology career began at WICC in Bridgeport.

On a recent morning, he read a roughly two-minute weather forecast for AM and FM listeners in Fairfield and New Haven counties seated before a classroom full of fifth graders. His voice crackled through a transistor radio perched atop his desk, a touch of old school for a new generation of students to appreciate.

Then Piorek took his headphones off, set his microphone down and returned to a day's worth of teaching science and religion at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School in Fairfield.

Piorek, a veteran Connecticut meteorologist who joined WICC in June after starting his career there in 1978, has spent the past school year making his own weather model before dawn, going on air in his fifth grade homeroom and buckling down for a day full of hands-on learning. His students start their day watching "Mr. Piorek" forecast the region's weather in a new daily tradition he hopes will get students excited about science.

"Having fun — that's what education's all about," Piorek said. "You want to enjoy it. You want to be there. You want to actually get excited for it. And the point of science to me is to not only to have

fun and to learn, but to have excitement for what you're doing and to show that in what you're doing as well."

Piorek got his first job out of high school at WICC as an overnight broadcaster in 1978, where he soon would cover one of the worst blizzards in recent New England history weeks into the job. The experience would kick off another three and a half decades delivering weather forecasts for roughly 30 stations around the eastern half of the United States, from the Weather Center at Western Connecticut State University and later News 12 Connecticut.

Piorek said he's loved every minute.

"To me, that wasn't work, formulating weather forecasts and doing it for all these radio stations," he said. "That, to me, was an affinity, a labor of love."

Mixed between those decades of weather reports has been a love for teaching. During the early part of his News 12 stint, Piorek taught at Greenwich Catholic School, working there from 1990 to 1995. He returned there after leaving News 12 in 2014, moved to St. Thomas Aquinas in 2016 and has been teaching fifth grade science and religion there ever since.

After agreeing to replace WICC's chief meteorologist Bill Jacquemin, who retired last year, Piorek has created a space to embrace both his passions at once.

"I've always loved astronomy and meteorology, and I wanted to share that passion about each of those two disciplines in science," Piorek said. "And the only way to do that is to teach, and what I bring into the classroom is not only a joy and love of all things astronomy or weather, but at the same time, sharing the joy and passion of sharing that knowledge with the kids."

His students build rain gauges to track precipitation, placing anemometers — or rotating devices that measure wind — on the school to collect data and making mini volcanoes before letting them erupt outside. They'll take trips to the Westport Observatory and Sacred Heart University's Discovery Science Center and Planetarium in Bridgeport.

Piorek believes in staying away from textbooks and encouraging students to "do" science, not just read about it.

But long before his lessons begin, Piorek is up at 4:30 a.m. preparing for his morning forecast. He looks over a range of international weather models along with National Weather Service data for the information he needs to predict the weather — temperature, dew point, precipitation type and probability, snow potential, wind speed, direction and gust and, perhaps most essential, decades of familiarity with the local climate.

"Although the models are important and although they play a major role in formulating a weather forecast, it's your innate sense of

what's going to happen that will ultimately determine the forecast for the WICC listening area," Piorek said.

Piorek delivers his weather reports seven days a week, broadcasting from St. Thomas Aquinas Monday through Friday and from home Saturday and Sunday. A phone plugs into a mixing board that controls audio settings and connects to his microphone at either of the two sites.

Just like that, he's ready for air. He reads his live reports at 6:46, 7:16, 7:46, 8:16 and 8:46 a.m. most weekdays, with the last two made possible by a brief pause for homeroom and then the first hour of school.

Piorek no longer occupies the Bridgeport studio where his career began with 45s and turntables at his fingertips. But he's fulfilling two life passions at once, too excited to feel as if he's working as he goes.

"Why would I ever retire?" he asked.