Rain, hail or supercell storm, Clem is the go-to man for Mallee weather

Posted on:
30 May 2023

Growing up legally blind, Clem Blake was naturally drawn to radio for most of his news.

He was also captivated by the weather – and the thrill of chasing unique weather events.

'I always had a fascination with the weather as a child and I started getting my own weather stations when I was 15,' Clem says.

After studying media in high school and working in community radio, Clem went on to earn a Diploma of Broadcasting and combine his 2 great passions.

These days, he boasts a fully equipped professional weather station at his home in Ouyen, near Mildura, and has presented weather forecasts for local ABC radio.

Clem’s weather knowledge is no mean feat.

His weather station has secured 5 successive gold awards for consistent observations to the Weather Observations Website (WOW) – a joint venture between Australia’s Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) and the Met Office in the UK.

'It certainly is an accomplishment, it feels really good,' says Clem, who is supported through the NDIS.

Clem’s highly valued forecasts are a triumph on social media too.

Boasting more than 7000 followers on his Mallee Weather Watch Facebook page, Clem shares a daily high-tech forecast for the region.

'I’ve been doing that for about 10 years, but we’ve made some big steps forward in that time,' Clem says.

'We used to only do a text-based forecast.

'Now we do a graphical forecast and a major video forecast every afternoon.

'We have our very own temperature weather maps too.

'It’s quite time consuming, so it’s all about time management.'

Though Clem enjoys pursuing his passions, he admits life with vision loss and other health problems is challenging.

With about 10 per cent vision, Clem can make out the beautiful contrasts of the Mallee region’s landscapes, but navigating his way around his community is difficult.

Clem also has fibromyalgia syndrome, a heart condition and epilepsy, all of which impact his mobility and energy.

Until Clem joined the NDIS about 4 years ago – supported through NDIS partner in the community Intereach – he was often at home, alone.

'I was very isolated and really didn’t get out much because it was hard for me to get around and do things,' Clem says.

'Now I have support workers who have become good friends who take me out to do things I enjoy.

'They’ve also helped me learn independent living skills like cooking and washing.

'And I have a lot more support for things like shopping, cleaning, and gardening.

'Life is definitely much better.

'If I didn’t have that support, I’m sure I’d still be very isolated.'

Today, Clem is out in his community, doing the things he loves, such as fishing and attending sheep-sales.

He’s also taking his love of special weather events to a new level.

'I’m an official storm spotter for BOM, so if we have a severe storm like the major supercell that came through last November hard and fast, I upload my weather station data and submit that directly to BOM’s weather line,' Clem says.

Last year, one of Clem’s NDIS support workers helped him achieve one of his proudest moments yet – chasing and capturing the Aurora Australis (Southern Lights).

'Thanks to the NDIS, I went on my very first Aurora chase last year with my support worker and that was absolutely amazing,' Clem says.

With his skills in broadcasting and graphic design, Clem’s hoping his increasing independence could soon lead to part-time, paid work from home.

'I have a lot of experience in radio production and presenting, social media and of course mapping,' he says.

'I’d really like to do more radio work if the opportunity comes up.'

Meanwhile, Clem is a favourite with locals who value his online weather observations.

When there’s a severe weather risk, Clem keeps his community informed in real time.

'There are a lot of people relying on those forecasts and so I often get stopped in the main street downtown, with people asking me what's happening with the weather,' Clem says.

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