

# Storm Trooper

## Kaufman man chases storms and catches some great footage of recent tornadoes

BY SEAN CHAFFIN

Dark blue and black, bruise-colored clouds filled the sky April 26. Weather warnings were blast across the Metroplex as winds picked up, rain poured, and tornadoes appeared. Most people in this situation would obviously run for shelter. Not Angelo Sanchez, as a storm chaser – he sees an opportunity.

This married father of two young daughters grew up in south Texas and moved to Kaufman in 2005. Currently, Sanchez works for Kaufman ISD print shop, but in recent years chasing and studying storms has become his passion.

"I've always been fascinated by storms. They can be deadly, but beautiful at the same time," Sanchez said.

"I have a great love for the earth sciences and at one time while in college I almost pursued a degree in geology. I'm fascinated with earth's dynamics, so naturally I wanted to learn more about it. The appeal in severe weather that I have is the beauty and strength and the conditions that put it all together."

**GETTING STARTED**  
For this storm chaser, the appeal is providing a community service by helping provide information to meteorologists. The thrill of the chase provides an adrenaline rush that Sanchez definitely finds appealing.

"It's hard for me to just sit in front of the TV watching amazing things going on

around me when I can be there taking it in and learning more," Sanchez said.

Sanchez entered the storm-chasing arena in 2010 as an amateur. First, he had to get certified to pursue his new passion. He took classes offered by the National Weather Service (NWS), which are open to anyone regardless of background. Sanchez is now certified through SKYWARN, a network of NWS-trained storm spotters.

The purpose of SKYWARN is to be the eyes on the ground for the NWS, which helps them in issuing watches and warnings based on actual conditions. During a major weather pattern, spotters relay information via radio, phone, or a special internet site. But being a storm spotter and actually having storms to spot are two different things. Since he is fairly new, Sanchez didn't have much footage until the recent tornado activity in Kaufman County. Fortunately, his preparation paid off.

**READY FOR THE STORM**  
A typical outing for Sanchez involves following forecasts for several days prior and seeing what develops as a storm approaches the North Texas area.

"I don't chase every storm -- just the ones that I feel or see have the best potential," he says. "For the most part the stronger storms tend to occur late afternoon to the evening hours and early morning," Sanchez said.

In 2010, Sanchez chased a tornado through

Seagoville, but wasn't prepared because he lacked the equipment needed and a good camera. The tornado was also difficult catching on his old cell phone camera because the twister was popping up and down in short spurts. Despite being within 300 yards, he couldn't take any good pictures or video. The storm tracker was determined his next opportunity would be different.

As equipment now, Sanchez now uses a Garmin GPS smartphone mounted to his windshield allowing him instant access for navigation, radar, warnings, camera and video, internet and calling.

"It's amazing how well these smartphones can do," Sanchez said. "Before, you needed a laptop, camera, and video camera. But for me, my phone is all I need. Listening to radio updates while driving helps to put me in good spots. Additionally, I also carry a better quality compact video camera. Of course the storm has to work with my schedule and budget, or I can't go on a chase." Recently, just such an opportunity presented itself.

**ON THE TORNADO TRAIL**  
With brisk winds and ominous skies, April 26 was not an average day. Warning sirens blared and weather forecasters gave warning to take cover. Tornadoes had been sighted – a perfect opportunity to track down a funnel cloud or possibly even a twister.

Initially, Sanchez had two lines of storms to choose



The Kaufman Herald/ANGELO SANCHEZ

Storm chaser Angelo Sanchez photographed this tornado while tracking the big storms of April 26 in the Mabank area.

from -- one moving toward Crandall and one moving toward Mabank.

"I chose Mabank because

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# TORNADO: Chasing storms are not for the weak of heart

Continued from Page 6A

I felt the conditions were much better for a tornado based on what I learned with the SKYWARN class and weather service information," he says. "The previous day I wasn't able to put myself in the right spot at the right time with the tornadoes that occurred out toward Italy. I intercepted a strong rotating storm between Corsicana and Italy, which had earlier dropped more than one tornado, but storm chasing is hit and miss."

The only "hits" on that day were hail hitting the ground and very strong winds. The Mabank situation would turn out differently.

Rolling into Mabank, he wheeled into a convenience store to get his bearings and determine his next move. He arrived just in time and watched as the storm cell rumbled its way into Mabank.

"I saw that the clouds were indeed looking pretty ominous. I was scanning the sky left to right along the cloud base when I saw the funnel begin to develop," he says. "I was only out of my car for less than five minutes, and never expected that a tornado would drop just a few blocks from me. I was confident that I had a good chance of seeing a tornado that day, but I was completely surprised that it was that quick."

The funnel cloud dropped out of the sky and touched the ground in less than a minute. The tornado was so close that Sanchez only had time to snap a

few photos and two short videos because the swirling mass was heading right in his direction. As he sat in his car at the convenience store, frantic drivers leapt from their cars and into the store as others wheeled back toward US-175.

"I decided to drive down US-175 for a safer and better vantage point, but once I got out again it had retreated as it crossed the highway and then dropped back down again but this time was rain wrapped and almost impossible to see with camera or video, but I could see it," he says.

"When I went back to see if the store was hit I was relieved to see that it was okay. The tornado had passed through just a few feet from where I was first parked."

The tornado passed through a path clear of homes or other buildings and only caused minor damage. Sanchez followed the storm system to Tyler, but darkness made documenting further tornadoes difficult.

But this outing was a success, and Sanchez had documented his first tornado and provided a much-needed service to the NWS. Despite the exhilaration and his training, the storm was a stressful situation.

"It was pretty scary because I didn't know which way that tornado was going to go."

Luckily, he - and his footage - made it out in one piece. Now, he just waits for the next storm.

For information about becoming a certified storm spotter, visit [www.nws.noaa.gov](http://www.nws.noaa.gov).



The Kaufman Herald/ANGELO SANCHEZ

Storm chaser Angelo Sanchez spotted this tornado while tracking the big storms of April 26 in the Mabank area.

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