INTERNS BECOME LEADERS

By Mark D. Schneider

The North Dakota Atmospheric Resource Board (NDARB) and the University of North Dakota (UND) have a long history of providing internships to aspiring pilots and meteorologists. The Pilot Internship Program (PIP) and the Meteorology Internship Program (MIP) are designed to prepare qualified students for a professional career through participation in a summer intern position with the NDARB during the North Dakota Cloud Modification Project (NDCMP). Since the PIP began back in 1974, a total of 407 intern pilots have participated and received training and experience of a unique nature. In 1996 the MIP was established, and so far 73 meteorology undergraduates and graduates have participated.

This summer, eight students are working as interns on a full-time basis either in Bowman, Stanley, Watford City, or Williston. The goal for these interns is to learn the duties of either their Pilot-in-Command (PIC) or radar meteorologist and be able to perform them under supervision by the end of the summer. For many interns, this experience is their first "real world" job and an excellent opportunity to work alongside professionals in their fields of study. When asked about his internship experience last summer on the NDCMP, Bowman Radar Meteorologist Jacob Azriel said "the NDCMP intern meteorologist program provided me with invaluable skills and knowledge for the radar meteorologist position. As an intern, I worked closely with my radar meteorologist to assist in operations. This allowed me to be fully prepared for the radar meteorologist position and to pass along my knowledge to an intern of my own in hopes they return as a radar meteorologist in the future."

Lucas Castro, current PIC based in Stanley had this to say about his experience last summer as an intern pilot. "The internship was an amazing opportunity that not only bolstered my ability as a pilot, but provided countless opportunities to experience flying that isn't found anywhere else in the industry. My experience as an intern was a natural steppingstone into a PIC position with Weather Modification, International as I was trained to operate missions as a commanding pilot, work in a multi-crew environment (which included radar support), and to navigate hazardous weather with an operational directive."

Of the five PICs and two radar meteorologists working on the NDCMP this summer, three of the pilots and the two meteorologists are previous program interns. This returning experience is valuable to all groups involved in the NDCMP because it allows a significant portion of the training to take place on-the-job. The PICs and radar meteorologists become leaders who supervise and teach the interns the different facets of their jobs. When a future employer with full-time permanent job openings receives applications from these young leaders, their supervisory experience proves very valuable.

There are many other skills besides leadership that have been learned by interns on the NDCMP. Ben Schaefer, former 2021 NDCMP intern meteorologist, is working his second season as a radar meteorologist in Stanley and had this to add. "I'll say honestly the biggest thing the internship did for me was help me improve my weather forecasting. I really enjoyed having the opportunity for applied learning and producing my own forecasts. I learned things that I wouldn't have otherwise in the classroom, for example, how quirky North Dakota summertime convection can be. Because of the internship, I now have a better understanding of how the weather behaves during project. Now as the radar meteorologist, I use this knowledge to better anticipate when to get planes up in the air for effective cloud seeding."