

He Loves OLLI, But Not Those Hurricanes!

Jeff Berardelli, chief meteorologist and climate specialist for WFLA News Channel 8, had never heard of OLLI before Jan. 8, when he attended the Winter Open House at TPepin's Hospitality Centre as keynote speaker.

But as he waited to come on stage to begin his talk, he looked around the room and saw more than 300 OLLI members and guests assembled there.



He heard OLLI Technology Coordinator Jeanne Dyer talk about the new tech classes being offered this semester. Classes on such topics as Chat GPT, Apple AI, blogging, cutting the cable cord, the dangers of AI, the basics of iPhones and Windows, and using technology for financial planning, hiking, photography, and creating music. He heard some of OLLI's new instructors talk about the classes they were offering, topics ranging from Shakespeare to gardening, from healthcare advocacy to growing up with Holocaust survivors.

As he took the stage, He said he was amazed to see all these people so actively embracing lifelong learning.

"I didn't know this existed. What a great program," he said.

Later, Berardelli expressed his regard for OLLI on WFLA's 6 p.m. broadcast, saying how pleased he was to see so many members at the Open House and how eager we are to keep learning.

The Threat of Hurricanes

Berardelli was at the Open House to discuss Florida's Hurricane Threat as the Climate Changes – "our favorite topic," he said.

Until recently, the Tampa Bay region was mostly spared the ravages of hurricanes. Only two major storms had struck the area since record-keeping began: The Great Gale of 1848, a category 4 storm that brought 10 to 15 inches of storm surge; and the Tarpon Springs Hurricane of 1921, with winds of 120 miles per hour and an 11-foot storm surge.

Was it the Tocobaga Indian tribe protecting us, as legend has it?

Berardelli doubts it, although for a long time we felt like we had protection from major storms. Then this season, Hurricanes Debby, Helene, and Milton ravaged the Tampa Bay area and even wrought destruction in the Carolinas and Tennessee.

“Is this just a temporary active period in the Gulf of Mexico or are the climate and weather patterns changing?” Berardelli queried. The obvious answer, he said, is that the peril of hurricanes will only get worse.

The reason is climate change brought on by a reliance of fossil fuels, leading to increasing temperatures in the atmosphere and oceans, he said. The warmer air leads to more rain, and the warmer water allows storms to intensify more rapidly, he said.

“The storms can go from a category 1 to a category 2 to a category 3 much faster. And they’re going from a category 3 to a 4 faster than they used to. So now, we’re two times more likely to see a category 1 become a major storm than in the 1980s,” he said.

The result, studies show, is that the incidence of major hurricanes hitting Florida will grow by 215 percent between the years 2060 and 2100, unless climate change is successfully addressed, he said.

“We have to realize that our dependence on fossil fuels has consequences,” he said, adding that efforts by individuals are not enough “We have to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels as a society,” he said.

More Highlights

Berardelli's talk was a major highlight of the morning that also provided the opportunity for members to talk to OLLI instructors, SIG members and committee leaders and to socialize with each other.

Many thanks to Open House sponsors CarePlus Health Plans, GTE Federal Credit Union, and Touch Stone Home Care.

Here are some scenes from the Open House:



















