

a kindergarten teacher. And, no, he doesn't use the coastal federation's boat to fish. "I prefer sitting on the beach, having a drink and casting in the surf."

Pursuing the PERFECT STORM

AT FIRST, David Gold's job sounds like every family's nightmare vacation: Pack 12 to 15 people in a van and spend eight to 12 hours a day driving around the Great Plains for up to ten days—with no fixed destination and stormy weather. But from April until early July, on one out of every two tours, Gold and his passengers will spot something that makes it all worthwhile: a tornado.

Gold, 34, is one of a handful of people—usually scientists or journalists—who get paid to pursue storms. Most chasers, including many scientists, hunt tornadoes on their own dime—and those dimes add up. Chasing storms can cost anywhere from several hundred dollars to \$50,000 a year when you factor in lodging, gasoline, van rental, satellite dishes, video cameras, computers and other electronic equipment. When Gold hunted storms as an impoverished graduate meteorology student, he used to sleep in his car in the parking lots of McDonald's restaurants.

Then, in 1997, he had a bright idea: Take paying customers along for the ride. He started Silver Lining Tours, now based in Houston, and his weather-enthusiast clients pay as much as \$3,300 per person for a six- to ten-day tour that includes hotel accommoda-

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tions along the chase route. The company, which grosses about \$200,000 a year, offers eight tours during the chase season, and Gold has had to hire another guide to share the load.

Gold spends about 30 days a year on the road, covering an average of 400 miles a day as he tracks tornadoes from the Rio Grande Valley in Texas to as far north as Canada. The rest of the year, he studies meteorology at Texas A&M University, where he recently completed a PhD. For his spin doctorate, he studied how the spiral motion of large storms produces tornadoes.

Finding storms is equal parts science, intuition and dumb luck. At the end of a day's pursuit, Gold studies computer models to assess the group's chances of spotting a twister; but he also relies on gut instinct, sharpened over more than a decade of storm chasing. His closest call came in 1991, when he and his friends took a wrong turn and drove straight into wrapping rain curtains directly adjacent to a tornado. They managed to escape the vortex unscathed.

If tornadoes aren't in the cards on a particular tour, Gold goes after smaller game, tracking thunderstorms instead. Once the skies clear, he says, "the rainbows are spectacular."

At home near a RANGE

HARRIET SIEW spends her days writing about food, talking about food, reading about food and tasting food. You'd think that when she arrives home at night, the last thing she'd want to do is eat. Not so, says Siew: "My husband and I truly

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