



Behind the Cameras

of the Morning News

by Tyler Ryan

When you work in morning news, “You are kidding me!” is the standard response to the first question that is usually asked by a guest or someone you meet at an event or the grocery store: “So what time do you get up?” The second question is “When do you sleep?”

An air of mystique has always surrounded news personalities, not so much in the actual presentation of the news but in what goes into it behind the scenes. For every morning news anchor, there are different responsibilities, routines, and even rituals.

WACH-Fox’s “Good Day Columbia” traffic anchor and lifestyle reporter Natalie Parsons starts her day with an alarm pulling her out of sleep at 1:45 a.m. “I hit snooze as many times as I can,” Parsons says. After a few snooze rounds, she feeds her dog Precious breakfast and heads to the station. Her first duty is to join the rest of the cast, producers, and crew of the show for a 4:40 a.m. pre-show meeting, where they go over the



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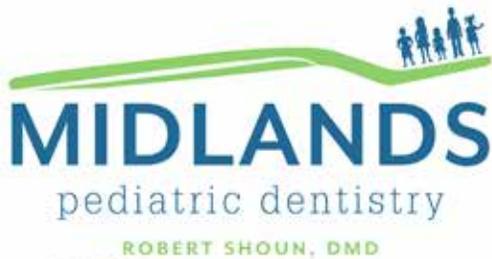


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show, talking about guests and stories of the day.

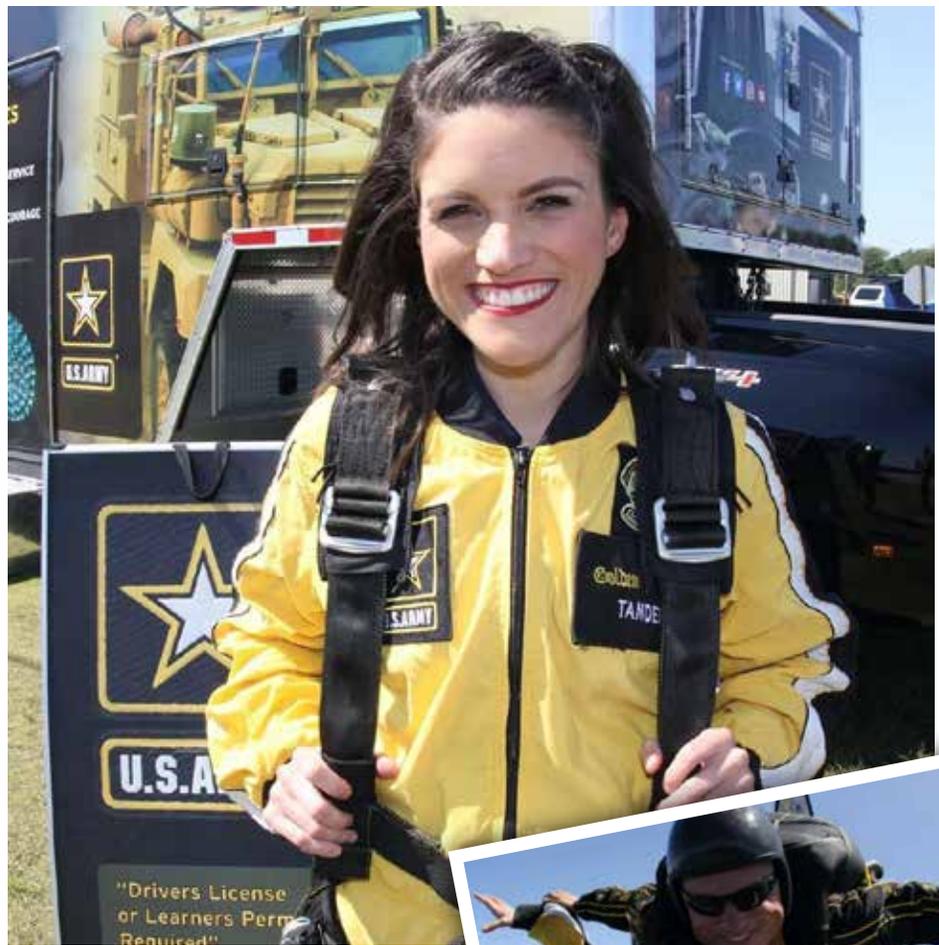
After the news meeting, it is off to the traffic center, which also serves as the weather center, joining morning meteorologist Marina Neuman in prepping traffic reports and other content. Parsons utilizes traffic apps, the Internet, phone calls, and social media to gather information that will have an impact on commuters. As a traffic anchor, reporting on ever-evolving information, Parsons also writes her content and begins her reports, in real time, to viewers of the show starting at about 5:45 a.m.

Between traffic cameras, calls to dispatch, and other information gathering for traffic, Parsons also produces entertainment segments that air in the final two hours of the WACH-Fox four-hour morning show. As with traffic, she also is responsible for booking guests and writing her segments. At 9 a.m., the studio lights go out, but Parsons still has several hours on the job to book guests, go into the field to shoot segments, and stay involved with social media before calling it a day in the early afternoon.

Across town, New 19's "This Morning" anchor Andrea Mock, a WLTX staple for over 11 years, has a different routine. Her alarm jumps off the nightstand at 3:15 a.m., and it isn't long before she's out the door with water and a K-cup. Mock explains that she and meteorologist Effren Afante don't care for the "weak stuff" that others drink, so they bring their own or elect a large pot with a note warning of the stout joe.

Mock then heads to her desk, where she reads the news scripts that have been written by one of the four producers, while putting on makeup. After going over the news of the day and putting her face on, at 4:50 a.m., she heads to the set, speaking to her co-anchor Brandon Taylor for the first time of the day. Mock explains that the time spent reading and applying makeup is necessary to "wake up."

Mock's day is different, in that she



works a split shift, anchoring the morning show and returning to co-host the long-running "Friend's at 5" show with Darci Strickland. She dashes out of the station at 7:15 a.m., so that she can get her nine-year-old son Brady ready for school and drop him off. The best part is that she also picks Brady up, where she gets to hear all of the stories of his day the moment he sits in the car. Mock has some family time, and then she's back to

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Tyler Ryan behind the scenes

the station and another round of reading scripts and putting on makeup for the afternoon show. Mock says that, although working two shows can be exhausting, “It is worth it.”

As for your writer, my day is a hybrid of the other two. My alarm goes off at 2:02 a.m., and, although in theory, I like the idea of a snooze, knowing that I still have to get up means that, before the first snooze can go off, I am already up and in the shower, and within about 20 minutes, I am suited up and out the door. The best thing - or at least good thing - about driving to work at the early hour of 3 a.m. or so, there is very little malfunction in the junction, so often the commute is much less frustrating than the 8 a.m. ride in. As soon as I walk into the ABC Columbia studio, it is straight to the coffee machine for the first and sometimes second of about nine I will drink before 7 a.m.

Because of the setup of the studio, I do get to greet my “Good Morning Columbia” co-hosts Claire Richardson and Curtis Wilson on their way up to the newsroom to also prepare.

My morning routine is just that: As a weather anchor and co-host, I gather data and begin to create my story, which, depending on Mother Nature, can take up a good chunk of time. I also prepare for and produce the segments and interviews that I host each morning. At about 4:15 a.m., I record the iHeart Radio weather reports that airs across market stations and the iHeart app. Also at around 4:15, I tuck my shirt, tie my tie, and put on makeup and tape the Web weather segment that appears on the app and Website. At 5 a.m., the studio lights are on, and it’s time for two hours of television. After the regular morning show, it’s time for local weather

segments that appear in “Good Morning America” and a post-show meeting, where the cast and crew discuss the show and prep for the following day. For the next several hours, it’s a mix of meetings, speaking with community groups and schools, and preparing for the weather at our Myrtle Beach station, which travels from ABC Columbia to our station in Charlotte to WFXB. The final task in my daily routine is the newscast at noon, and at 12:31 p.m., my tail lights are heading down Main Street.

Regardless of the station or role, the life of AM Newscasters isn’t a 9 to 5, but, as much as they are different, they are alike and have a passion for storytelling, helping the community, and a solid love of good coffee. ■

