

Byline: Anita Lee

Aug. 1--On a witness stand, Timothy P. Marshall appears every inch the mild-mannered engineer in his business suit and oversized wire-rimmed glasses.

But get him out of a courtroom and it's like Superman stepping from the phone booth. He becomes Tim Marshall, storm chaser.

Marshall drove from his home in the Dallas area to a Slidell parking garage in an extended cab Chevy pickup, loaded down with supplies and technology, to track Hurricane Katrina.

"I've had several close calls on flying debris," Marshall said, "and that's why I want to be in a parking garage."

During Hurricane Alicia in 1989, he said, he saw a portable toilet whiz by in a blur of blue.

Marshall's day job is at Haag Engineering Co., where he has worked for 23 years. He said in sworn testimony that he became a shareholder in the company 10 to 15 years ago.

Marshall's sworn testimony came a couple of weeks ago in the first Katrina case to go to trial. He offered it on behalf of Nationwide insurance. Attorneys and policyholders have criticized Haag and Marshall, saying they provide biased reports for their mainstay clients, insurance companies.

But the company says it has offered unbiased opinions for 82 years. For his part, Marshall says he is a scientist and engineer who follows his professional responsibility to be objective.

For Hurricane Katrina, Marshall initially came to Mississippi on his own as a storm chaser.

He had a satellite receiver in his truck. The signal bounced back to his laptop. Images he got as Katrina roared ashore were no more than six minutes old.

Once the storm passed, he went home, got some rest and returned with a rod and level to measure the storm surge and survey the damage for Haag.

"It was absolutely a record for me," said Marshall, who measured surge the equivalent of three stories high in Bay St. Louis. "I have never seen this kind of water height in my entire hurricane survey career, and that's going back almost 30 years."

Marshall also gathered wind data from the few sources available. His report has been criticized by policyholders and their attorneys, who believe he minimized the wind damage for insurance companies.

Marshall says his data was preliminary and his report is available to anyone who wants to buy it.

His professional credentials are lengthy and impressive.

He lectures on wind vs. water damage, a seminar that has been offered to insurance companies.

He is on the Quick Response Team for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, home of the National Hurricane Center. He's also been inducted into the prestigious Civil Engineering Academy at his alma mater, Texas Tech University, where he earned master's degrees in civil engineering and atmospheric science.

His storm-chasing videos and other materials are available from his virtual store on the Web site he edits, [stormtrack.org](http://stormtrack.org).

He's talked tornado on Oprah and educational and science channels.

He served as a consultant on the movie "Twister," but was not impressed with the finished product.

"The 'Twister' movie," Marshall said, "is a Hollywood fantasy. There's a lot of problems with the movie 'Twister' technically."