

New series with veteran science journalist Miles O'Brien to feature ASU researchers

'Resolve to Solve' is the first national series from Arizona PBS; will run Wednesday nights starting in August

By Joe Rojas-Burke, ASU News
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Extreme heat kills more people than hurricanes, floods and tornadoes combined in a typical year, but people don't recognize it as a serious problem. Why is that?

That was the question veteran science journalist Miles O'Brien asked Arizona State University heat researcher [Jennifer Vanos](#) in front of a studio audience at Arizona PBS on Thursday.

The two were hosting a sneak preview of "[Resolve to Solve with Miles O'Brien](#)," a new series that will run nationally in the Wednesday-night lineup of PBS starting in August. It is the first national series from Arizona PBS.

One-hour episodes follow O'Brien on travels across four continents to meet the optimists and innovators who are tackling some of the planet's most daunting challenges, including protecting people from life-limiting heat in a warming climate.

Heat goes unrecognized as a disaster, said Vanos, in part because the devastation hits hardest among people on the economic margins.

"A lot of times, for the general population, those challenges of heat are invisible to us. Or they don't affect us as much as it would someone who's living at the margins, who's looking at their energy bill and turning off the air conditioner because they can't afford it that month," she said.

Vanos is an associate professor in the [School of Sustainability](#) and senior scientist with the [Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory](#).

"The media has not done a great job telling this story," O'Brien said. "So it was very important to me that one of our episodes focus on this."

Metro Phoenix is “probably the most important heat laboratory in the world” he said, where ASU researchers are finding answers to vital questions:

Who's most vulnerable?

Why do some neighborhoods do better than others?

What actually works to mitigate heat?

How do we address things like the unhoused or poorly housed individuals who don't have a lot of air conditioning to blast?

How can we keep people safe as, inevitably, these temperatures go up?

The PBS show highlights work by Vanos that is helping cities and schools provide heat-safe outdoor spaces for kids to exercise and play.

“It really opens your eyes to the value of shade, to the importance of picking surfaces on a playground that kids aren't going to get burned on, which can happen here,” O'Brien said.

Along with the science, O'Brien gives viewers a chance to get to know the scientists as people.

“I think of the show as Anthony Bourdain meets Sir David Attenborough,” he said.

Vanos, we learn, was captain of her college track team and training hard in hot weather helped drive her choice of career.

“It kind of first started with me experiencing heat exhaustion myself as a runner,” she said.

She wanted to pursue a deeper understanding of heat impacts on the human body and how to make outdoor places safer from those impacts.

She and her colleagues are pursuing practical solutions, not just results to publish in a journal.

“I'm often looking not just at the life or death, but what's happening to people's lives,” Vanos said.

“How are they able to live? Can you go for your walk? Can you take your kids to play? Can you work? We're trying to find solutions to increase livability.”

ASU's [Ariane Middel](#) appears in the heat episode working with [MaRTy](#), a rolling instrument station that measures human thermal exposure and other meteorological data.

Middel, an associate professor in [The GAME School](#) and the [School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning](#), has used MaRTy to study the cooling effects of reflective pavement coatings and to test a mapping tool that finds the coolest, shadiest ways to reach destinations on foot.

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The show also features [David Sailor](#), professor and director of the School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning at ASU, and [David Hondula](#), who leads the city of Phoenix Office of Heat Response and Mitigation and is an associate professor at ASU's School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning.

“Resolve to Solve” will air on Wednesdays at 9 p.m. starting Aug. 19. Half-hour versions will be accessible on the PBS Youtube channel and on the PBS app. The series was made possible in part by [support provided by Sue Hart-Wadley and Searle Wadley](#).

One episode explores the effort to build a giant sea curtain in Antarctica to protect ice sheets from warm ocean waters. Other segments feature researchers who are innovating ways to adopt cleaner power sources and scientists who are working to restore disrupted ecosystems.

“I don't think people fully understand that some of these big problems we face, we do have some tools in the toolbox. We just need to deploy them,” O'Brien said. “When you look at journalism at large, we tend to talk a lot about problems. We don't tend to focus enough on solutions, much to the detriment of journalism and the general public.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

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Main image



Science journalist Miles O'Brien and ASU Associate Professor Jenni Vanos answer questions during a preview of the new PBS show "Resolve to Solve" at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Photo by Deanna Dent/Arizona State University

Text image(s)



From left: Arizona PBS general manager Scott Woelfel, veteran journalist Miles O'Brien and ASU Associate Professor Jenni Vanos talk about heat research during a sneak peek of O'Brien's new Arizona PBS show "Resolve to Solve" on June 11 at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Photo by Deanna Dent/Arizona State University



Science journalist Miles O'Brien and ASU Associate Professor Jenni Vanos flash their ASU pitchforks during the sneak peek of the O'Brien's new Arizona PBS "Resolve to Solve" on June 11 at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Photo by Deanna Dent/Arizona State University