

Herald News, The (Joliet, IL)

Weather man

Joliet father sets up own weather station at his home

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(Captions refer to 3 photos on last page...)

Caption: Kelly Gleason and his 3-year-old twin daughters Lizzie (left) and Lainie (right) keep their eyes on the sky in the back yard of their Caton Ridge home in Joliet, while their weather station's anemometer measures the wind's direction and speed. All the weather information measured by his equipment is downloaded constantly on his Web site, <http://catonfarm.com>.

Caption: Kelly Gleason enjoys a morning cup of coffee while he checks his weather Web site, <http://catonfarm.com>. Gleason is a member of a weather collective called WeatherUnderground.

Caption: Kelly Gleason's Web site is called <http://catonfarm.com>.

When Kelly Gleason and his family moved to far west Joliet from Hickory Hills two years ago, it quickly became clear that they had moved into the land of interesting weather.

"The weather was boring in Hickory Hills," he said. "There were trees everywhere. You couldn't see the sky."

Frustrated with the forecasts on TV -- he didn't care what conditions were at O'Hare or by the Lake -- he took advantage of the weather and set up the Caton Farm Weather Station and Web site, CatonFarm.com.

He and his wife, JoAnne, and their four kids, Julianne, 14; Alex, 12; and 3-year-old twins Elaine and Elizabeth, moved into their home in the Caton Ridge subdivision in July 2001. In October, the lake behind their house -- which fills up, then empties into the DuPage River -- suddenly rose from all the rain in western Will County and crept up toward their back yard.

"So all the water is landing in western Joliet and it's not going anywhere except my back yard," he said. "I'm searching all over the Internet for info about river flows. There's sensors at certain points in rivers that show the levels in real time. Then I found some satellite pictures of this area when it was a farmer's field, and I could see where the water flowed."

A few clicks of the mouse later, he found WeatherUnderground. By looking around the site, he discovered something called a personal weather station. Clicking on it, he found someone in Orland Park who had set up his own weather Web site with information about the weather conditions happening at his home.

"I thought it was so neat that I could see data from Orland Park instead of at Midway or O'Hare," he said.

A personal weather station allows its user to measure and record temperature, humidity, wind direction, wind speed, barometric pressure and rainfall. This information can be wired to a home computer.

The WeatherUnderground Web page even provided links to the equipment needed to collect weather information.

And that's when the eye-rolling from Kelly Gleason's family began.

"All of this started out as a Valentine's Day gift," JoAnne Gleason said.

"I was like, 'You are nuts,' " she said. " 'You are not going to build your own weather station!' "

But that is exactly what he did. He ordered a Davis Vantage Pro device, which is now attached to the wooden fence in his back yard, and set up the software in his computer. A small electronic unit in his house hooks up to his computer, transmitting data from the outside device to the computer. The software sends it to his Web page. The site updates automatically every 15 minutes.

"I'm an independent computer consultant, and I always wanted to have a Web page," he said. "I'd like it to have useful information on it so people would go back to see it. So little by little, this hobby started to evolve. My wife thinks I'm nuts. The kids think I'm nuts."

WeatherUnderground

WeatherUnderground was co- founded in 1991 at the University of Michigan by Jeff Masters, the site's chief meteorologist.

"I wrote a simple program, a text- only protocol called Telnet," he said. "I found out about a cool thing called the Internet and found I could take real-time weather data coming into our computers and put it on the Net for anyone to use."

In 1995, they moved off campus but kept the name -- a tongue-in- cheek reference to the radical Students for a Democratic Society (which also started at the University of Michigan).

"When we started the company, we decided we wanted to have the coolest weather Web site up there," he said. "I think that's true. We're the No. 2 weather site behind the Weather Channel."

They implemented personal weather stations in 2000 and have been very pleased with the results, he said.

"We're finding it's mostly weather hobbyists who are setting up weather stations," he said. He's not surprised that his site is so popular.

"I've been in the weather business for 20-some years, and I know there are a lot of weather nuts out there," he said. "I used to work for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Organization doing hurricane research, and my job was to fly into hurricanes and get the data on them. Based on the number of people who were always trying to get on flights, it doesn't surprise me at all there are a number of weather nuts."

Another weather `nut'

Jim Davis of Bolingbrook also has a personal weather station set up. He set up his before finding WeatherUnderground, however.

"When I set up the weather station ... I thought it might be nice to share the data, since it's coming in all the time," he said. "I found the software and then found I could put it on the Internet."

His site is jldweather.wxhost.com, and it, too, can be accessed through WeatherUnderground.com.

"WeatherUnderground is a network of people who are collectively making weather a lot more predictable," he said.

Davis said he's been interested in weather most of his life, but his hobby took off when he received a small weather station three years ago.

"I realized I wanted a whole lot more," he said. "So I began looking at equipment, and I realized it's not like a Ham Radio tower, but a small mast on your roof that no one can really see."

Like Gleason's, the equipment on Davis's roof reads the conditions and transmits the data to a remote console, which feeds to his computer.

"I'm fascinated by the weather, the changes in the weather and the impact it has on our lives," he said. "We go through every day making decisions based on the weather. To be able to watch and understand and to some degree predict it allows me to be more engaged in what's going on in the world of weather and apply that to my own life."

Gleason is another one of those weather "nuts."

"I do see some fascinating stuff out here when these storms hit," Gleason said. "When all of a sudden there are 50-mile-an-hour winds, the barometer drops right off, the temperature drops, the wind changes direction. ... It's amazing when you see stuff like that."

Gleason and his son attended a tornado-spotting class taught by someone from the National Weather Service at the Troy Fire Station, where they learned how to identify wall clouds, shelf clouds, funnel clouds and other threatening weather conditions. They can report such conditions as trained spotters.

They also receive instantaneous thunderstorm and tornado warnings and watches sent to their cell phones, a service provided by WeatherUnderground. So he generally knows when severe weather is coming five minutes before reports are out on television or radio.

"It could be a beautiful day and I'm putting the lawn chairs up and parking the cars in the garage," he said.

The Gleasons have seen their share of exciting weather this summer. Like on May 30, when the Joliet area experienced a night of violent storms and tornado warnings. There's a picture on his Web site of the wall cloud that passed over his house.

"He's taking pictures, and I'm yelling to get in the basement," JoAnne Gleason said.

So northern Illinois may not have views of breathtaking mountains. The trade-off, as he sees it, is that we have unlimitless horizons to behold wild cloud formations and unpredictable weather.

Although he doesn't expect everyone to be nuts about the weather the way he is, he hopes to attract people to his Web site. WJOL's Scott Slocum frequently refers to the Caton Farm Weather Station.

"I love what Kelly has done," he said. "It's so important to know and tell people what's going on here instead of the lakefront or at O'Hare, and <http://www.catonfarm.com> gives us that."

"I think I'm fulfilling a need," Gleason said. "There's nothing else for the Plainfield/Joliet area. I love getting e-mail from someone telling me they check it every day. And if anyone has any ideas about what they would like to see on it, let me know. It makes me feel like someone else is getting some value out of it."



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Current Conditions (updated every 10 minutes)

Current weather	Dry
Temperature	74.9 °F (24.4 °C)
Humidity	69 %
Dew point	64.1 °F
Average speed	8.1 mph
Current speed	9.0 mph
Direction	SE
Gust last hour	19.0 mph SSW
Barometer	30.094 in.
Today's rain	0.000 in.
Wind Force	3 mph
Cloud base	3105 ft
Humidex	89.5 °F

Time: 9:50:04 AM
 Date: 9/11/2003

www.CatonFarm.com - Joliet, Illinois - Weather

LAST READING AT TIME: 09:50 DATE: September 11 2003 ,Time of next update: 10:00

Weather	Dry	Current Temperature	74.9 °F (24.9 °C) (Heat Index 76.7 °F)
Minimum Temperature (since 0 AM)	74.9 °F at 09:50 AM	Minimum Temperature (since 0 hour)	76.7 °F at 09:22 AM

