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Courtesy of The Journal Record—04/14/2009

### **Bringing personalized weather data, one application at a time**

By: Brian Brus

OKLAHOMA CITY – The interplay of air fronts, pressure and humidity in Oklahoma can just as easily generate a new business as it does a storm. Especially in Norman.

Take Mike Wolfinbarger's work as director of technology at the Oklahoma Climate Survey, for example, and the iPhone application he and his peers created for professionals at the Weather Sphere, a hub of meteorological education, research and industry at the University of Oklahoma.

RadarScope provides active NEXRAD weather radar readouts from more than 140 different radar sites. And within days of its release in late 2008, it quickly climbed up the list of most popular weather apps for the iPhone, with thousands of purchases at \$9.99 each, legitimizing Base Velocity as an ongoing business opportunity.

"It's something that we want to support and keep doing as a side venture," Wolfinbarger said. "Is it conceivable that it could spin out and become its own thing? Yeah. I'm not sure I see it, at its current income level, as a full-time venture for us to quit OU and do full time.

"But there's money to be made there, and it's possible somebody could do it," he said. "The reason it's worked as well as it has for us is because we had all the pieces in place here over a long period of time, and we were able to combine that with new technology as it became available. So being in this environment is a huge advantage."

Base Velocity, recently recognized as a Journal Record Innovator of the Year, is a good example of the businesses that have spun out of the Weather Sphere, said Kevin Kloesel, assistant dean of OU's College of Atmospheric and Geographic Sciences.

The complex adjacent to the OU campus houses dozens of agencies and programs that work in partnership with OU, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and state organizations to collect and analyze meteorological data. Many of those relationships generate marketable products and services.

"The federal government has done a really nice job of forecasting weather for a really large area with respect to warnings and what you should do in the event of hazardous weather," Kloesel said. "But each individual event is different, so the ability to customize this technical information – for somebody who is working on an oil rig, for example, or involved in transportation or a school field trip – has typically been the purview of the private sector.

“And because those private-sector folks are located here, they have an opportunity to take advantage of all the latest research, literally at the doorstep of technological advances in our field, and turn that data into action,” he said.

Kloesel cited several private companies operating at the Weather Sphere and feeding off each others’ research and creativity: WeatherBank Inc., for example, a provider of custom weather and long-range forecast services to the energy, agriculture, transportation and retail marketplaces; and Vieux & Associates Inc., an engineering technology firm specializing in rainfall- and runoff-related software and services.

“You have the expertise in academia and the expertise in forecasting and warning generation, and then you have these really bright people like Mike who can customize it,” Kloesel said. “It’s going to create opportunities.”

As for Wolfinbarger, he’s happy for now to hold his day job developing software and operating Mesonet to get weather data to the public. He’s not ready to predict the future of RadarScope and Base Velocity.

“There’s a number of directions it could go. It could be spun off and picked up by one of the private weather companies around here,” Wolfinbarger said. “Where it’s going to take us in the long term, I don’t know. We’re kind of taking it a few days at a time.”