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### Weather museum in the dreams of Norman

By: Julianna Parker/Norman Transcript

Academic researchers, private industry and government officials all collaborating on weather in Norman makes this the weather capital of the region, if not the nation.

With that distinction, it only makes sense Norman might take the next step: A weather museum.

At the moment, the idea is still just that -- an idea. But the group working toward a National Weather Museum and Science Center is taking steps to make their idea a reality.

"It's a dream we have and we're starting to move towards it," said Doug Forsyth, chief of Radar Research and Development for the National Severe Storms Laboratory, who has been heading up the movement for a museum. "They're small steps but you have to take that first step and it leads to bigger things."

The weather museum would feature weather prediction artifacts like hangars and radar that are just sitting in storage now. It also would include scientific information on weather prediction and monitoring and the history of tools such as the radar that was invented in Norman.

The museum also would have an educational component, informing the public about severe weather and safety. And those are just few of the ideas the group has been talking about, Forsyth said.

"I've got a book about that thick just full of ideas," he said as he indicated with his thumb and forefinger.

The idea for a weather museum has been around for 10-15 years, said Randy Pepler, associate director of the Cooperative Institute for Mesoscale Meteorological Studies, who has been involved in the project for several years. There really isn't a full weather museum in the country, and it makes sense to have it in Norman, Forsyth said.

"We are in tornado alley and we're in a place where people are intrigued with the weather," he said.

The project really took off, however, when the Norman Chamber of Commerce's Weather Committee formed a subcommittee focused on creating a weather museum, Peppler said.

"I think the chamber weather committee kind of gave it a possible framework," Peppler said.

The subcommittee was made up of those interested in forming a museum, including members of the University of Oklahoma, private weather industry and the local business community.

The group branched out of the Chamber in November 2007 and formed a registered Oklahoma nonprofit. But it was still waiting on its IRS nonprofit status until this past month.

The group officially received its 501(c)3 status Dec. 15, which will allow it to seriously fundraise and seek grants for the creation of a museum, Peppler said.

"We don't have any real funding now," Forsyth said. "We're basically low budget."

Fundraising has started on a small scale though. The group passed out fliers at the weather festival at the National Weather Center this fall. The fliers invited everyone interested to pay \$25 to become members of the National Weather Museum and Science Center. There are about 40 members already.

Members will be honored by name when the museum is eventually built. For now, members can discuss plans for the museum at a yearly meeting, the next of which will be Jan. 27.

The National Weather Museum and Science Center still looks like a far-off dream, however.

And with the way the economy is, it's uncertain if any major fundraising will be successful at this point.

"With the economic downturn, the dream may be little farther away," Forsyth said. But he said he's still making plans.

"I'd like to be ready for that opportunity when it comes along," he said.

Until the museum has its own building, Forsyth said he would like to see a temporary home for the museum in the short-range, even if it's a mobile display.

Despite the challenges, the weather museum supporters are pushing forward in their dream.

"We're gonna keep plugging along and we what happens," Peppler said.

Those interested in helping out with the National Weather Museum and Science Center may

become a member for \$25 for individuals, \$50 for a family and \$100 for corporate. Checks may be sent to National Weather Museum and Science Center, Attn.: Membership, P.O. Box 6222, Norman, OK 73070.

Donations of weather-related items also will be accepted. Individuals also may help by relating their stories about Oklahoma weather.