

# City man launches weather website

**GARY WHEELER'S HOBBY  
OFFERS CONDITIONS  
HERE AND ELSEWHERE**

**Gerald Gauthier**

LETHBRIDGE HERALD

ggauthier@lethbridgeherald.com

All Gary Wheeler really wanted was an accurate local weather forecast.

He's gone to what many might consider extreme measures to get it. In doing so, he admits, he's become a weather geek.

Since getting his first portable weather station about a year ago, the amateur weatherman has followed his natural curiosity and used his knack for technology to launch his own weather website.

In addition to providing regularly updated details on local conditions from a weather station outside his West Lethbridge home, the website automatically uploads and displays data from weather stations across Alberta, North America and the rest of the world.

"It's strictly a hobby," says Wheeler, 52, who maintains his pet project using a single hard drive and two flat-screen monitors in a workshop in his garage. "It's just something to amuse

me, nothing more.

"I don't want to be a full-fledged meteorologist because then it's not going to be fun."

He admits his intense curiosity about the weather probably looks like an obsession to others.

"If you go in head first, you're only in up to your ankles," he says, grinning. "It's addicting."

His interest in the weather grew out of his frustration with the fact local media and internet forecasts frequently differed from each other. Wheeler's website [www.westlethbridgeweather.com](http://www.westlethbridgeweather.com) uploads current local weather conditions every 30 seconds and updated weather data hourly from everywhere else.

"This is the weather model for the next seven days," he says, clicking his computer mouse on a screen showing the projected movement of weather systems over the Pacific Ocean and most of North America.

"I can get you data from anywhere you want in the world."

Current local conditions are displayed in great detail showing the current temperature — precise to one-tenth of a degree C — as well as wind chill, barometric pressure, wind speed and direction, precipitation, humidity and the elevation of the cloud ceiling.

The website includes a detailed

four-day local forecast, provincial weather maps and links to numerous other websites such as Environment Canada, The Farmer's Almanac, the Canadian Hurricane Centre and several sites operated by the U.S. National Weather Service.

It's also linked to weather radar sensors.

"What's really cool is you can see a storm coming and you can watch it all. It's fascinating," he says.

He developed the website so he could check the weather when he was away from home.

His hobby is a relaxing escape, he says, from the long hours he devotes to his business, Dok-Tor Harddrive, which has him setting up and maintaining commercial computer networks.

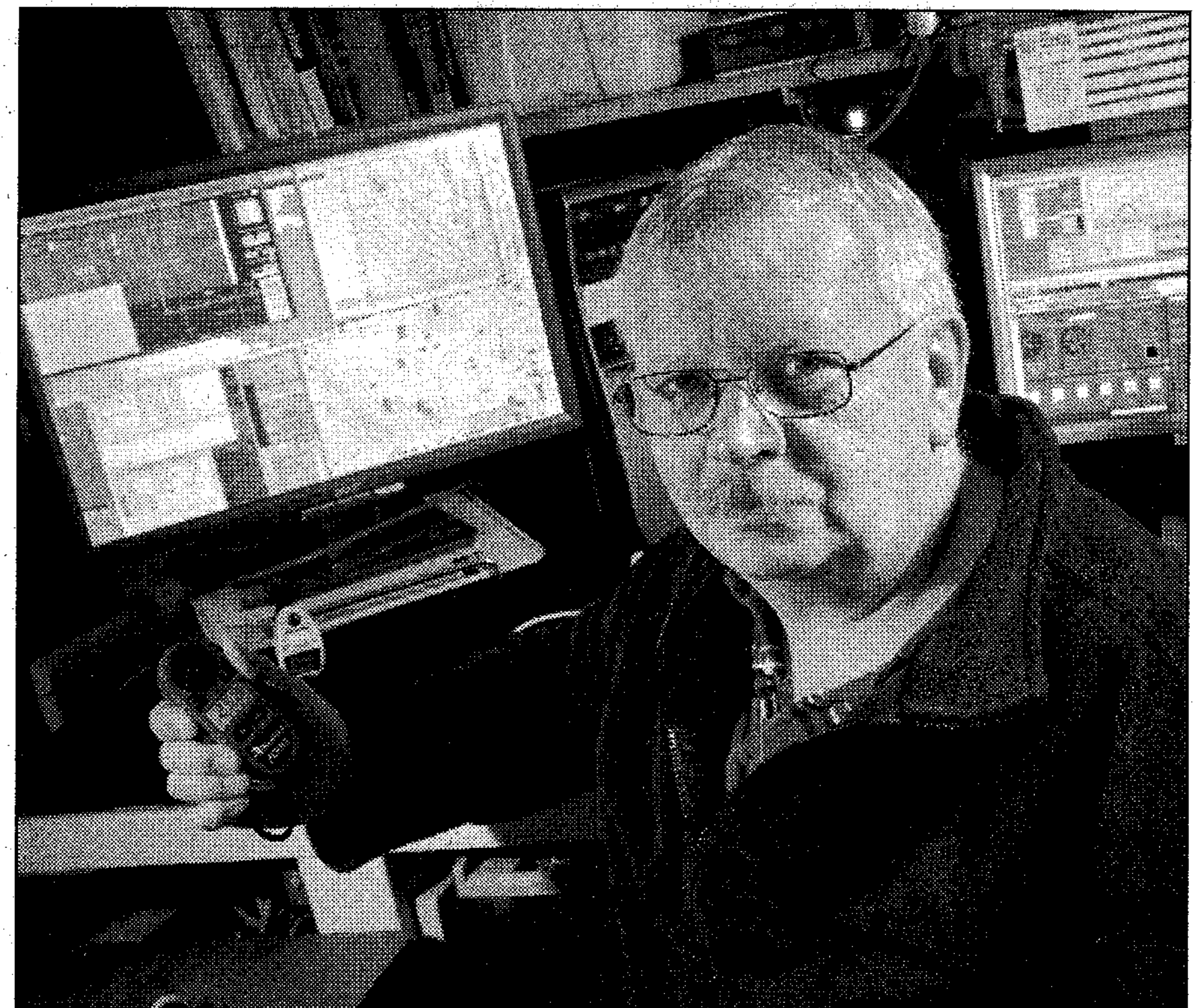
"I needed something less stressful than dealing with (computer) breakdowns and server problems," he says. "I like the geeky stuff."

"Weather affects everybody — what you wear, what you eat, what you do."

He's had hits on his website from people as far away as Romania, Australia and Ukraine.

"Without technology, without the internet," he says, "this never would have happened."

So, if all the weather forecasts we get are based on the same weather data, the question remains: why is it



Herald photo by Ian Martens

Amateur weatherman Gary Wheeler displays some of his weather measuring equipment and monitors at his westside home.

they seldom agree?

"It's everybody's interpretation," he explains. "There are a lot of people out there smarter than me that are playing with this, and they can't figure it out (either) — so I don't feel too bad."

He hopes soon to be able to build four-dimensional illustrations of

weather conditions on the website.

Wheeler taught himself about weather in much the same way he taught himself about computers more than a decade ago.

"I bought a computer and I broke it so many times, I locked myself in the basement and I didn't come out until I had learned it (inside out)," he says.