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Kentucky Mesonet moves into WKU's Center for Research and Development

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City and state officials celebrate Monday during a ribbon-cutting ceremony for Kentucky Mesonet at Western Kentucky University's Center for Research and Development.

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The Kentucky Mesonet, an expanding network of weather stations that spans Kentucky, has moved into a new space at Western Kentucky University's Center for Research and Development.

"It almost doubles the amount of space we have," said Stuart Foster, a state climatologist who directs the Kentucky Climate Center and the Kentucky Mesonet.

On Monday, the Kentucky Mesonet joined with the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce to celebrate the opening of its new operations center with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

It's a big step up for the network, which now includes more than 70 stations that offer localized weather information to communities across the state. Foster estimated that the new space in the center totals about 2,200 square feet.

In the center's old home in an academic building on WKU's main campus, staff often had to swap desks with students working for the Mesonet. The larger space offers more room for staff offices and student workspace, a small lab for calibrating meteorological instruments and storage for equipment.

For Jennifer Van Antwerp, a senior studying meteorology who works for the Mesonet as a researcher, the new space is a welcome change.

"There wasn't much room for growing," Van Antwerp said.

Despite only working for the network for a little more than a year, Van Antwerp has already witnessed how fast it is growing and how in demand its services are. At times, when a station has needed to briefly go offline for maintenance, the phone in her office immediately starts ringing with callers clamoring for answers about its status, she said.

Throughout Kentucky, Mesonet stations collect data on temperature, precipitation, humidity, barometric pressure, solar radiation, soil moisture and wind speed and direction, transmitting it to the Kentucky Climate Center at WKU every five minutes, 24

hours a day, throughout the year. The data is available online at kymesonet.org and through its mobile app.

Along with the growing room, the Mesonet's new home at WKU's Center for Research and Development presents other opportunities, Foster said.

"It will increase our capacity to work with and engage students in different projects," he said, adding the space provides opportunities to work with the Small Business Accelerator and is more accessible to the public. "It's a location that should facilitate better interactions with the public and private sector."

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