

# GROUNDHOGS, TECHNOLOGY AND FORECASTING

## Whether it's folklore or science, website strives to predict weather

After last weekend's arctic assault, I've had enough of winter. People's interest in the weather seems to increase when we actually have some. Everyone wants to know how bad it's going to be, how long it's going to last and what's coming next.

On Saturday, the world's most famous prognosticating rodent will tell us how much of my least favorite season we have left. In these days of satellites, super computers and Doppler radar, why are we depending on an oversized rat to tell us the weather?

It turns out that Punxsutawney Phil isn't the only animal that people claim can predict the weather. According to the weather section on The Old Farmer's Almanac website, [almanac.com/weather](http://almanac.com/weather), the color of a woolly caterpillar's stripes, the frequency

of a cricket's chirps, where a squirrel hides its nuts and whether the cows are standing or lying down are all meteorological signs.

The Farmer's Almanac has long been associated with predicting the weather. Rumor has it that the secret formula used for making long-range projections is kept in a locked black box in the publisher's office. The website states the predictions are made by analyzing data from meteorology, climatology and solar activity. And it



KEVIN O'NEILL  
InSites

claims to be accurate 80 percent of the time.

The site is full of educational, interesting and fun information about the weather and people's attempts to predict it over

time. The drop-down box under the site's weather link includes topics such as history, prediction, survival, folk lore and, of course, forecasts.

Each subsection features a gallery of photo links with a headline and a few lines from the beginning of the article accompanying each one. The articles are written in a light-hearted fashion and are usually illustrated with photos, drawings, charts or video. They are mostly short reads, which encourages you to explore the site, but some-

times leaves you wanting more information.

The typography and color palette attempt to evoke the folksy charm associated with the Farmer's Almanac. But the cluttered layout and intrusive ads, both static and dynamic, dash any hope of folksiness.

The site is a fun read. It has a nice mix of fact and fiction relating to people's beliefs on the weather. Whether you use goose bones, groundhogs or algorithms to predict the weather, this site can tell you about it. But like all weather forecasters, it isn't perfect. The almanac's long-range prediction for last weekend, when we had ice storms and sub-zero temperatures, was rainy and mild.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a staff artist for The Times-Tribune. Share your favorite websites and apps with him at [koneill@timeshamrock.com](mailto:koneill@timeshamrock.com).

