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Weather service honors 60-year volunteer

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The National Weather Service presented Mr. Layton Munson of Sedgwick Colorado the Helmut E. Lundsberg award for 60 years of service as a cooperative observer on Wednesday Sept 19. From the left: Nolan Doeskin, Colorado State Climatologist, wife Sally Munson, honoree Layton Munson, Carl Burroughs, National Weather Service Boulder, and Byron Louis, Data Acquisition Program Manager, Boulder.

Layton Munson measured the snow dropped by the blizzard of '49, and one year recorded a high temperature of 114 degrees outside his home in Sedgwick.

Almost every day for the last six decades he has measured temperatures, the amount of rain and snow near his home and reported unusual weather phenomenon to the National Weather Service.

The weather service will present Munson, 89, with an award for his 60 years of volunteer service today.

Munson's tenure is an unusual length of time for a weather observer to be active in the NWS Cooperative weather program, said Frank Benton, weather service specialist with the Denver/Boulder weather forecast office.

"He just became addicted to it, it just became part of his daily life," said Munson's wife of 63 years, Sallie Munson.

Munson is one of about 90 volunteers recording weather conditions throughout the Denver/Boulder area, said Benton.

"We give them some weather equipment, rain gauges and automatic temperature measuring systems and they report to us."

There are several thousand Coop weather observers throughout the country and they provide invaluable information to weather service climatologists, Benton said. "It is very important. It is fed into models and all kinds of information, we get the data real time and we get it right away."

Munson started with the weather service in 1947. "I just got out of the Army and I was going to raise cattle and do a little farming and the weather bureau man got hold of me. They had a fellow doing it here, but he just did it when he wanted to, and the man said they couldn't put up with that."

For years he had to go outside the house to check a thermometer for the high and low temperatures of the day. Now he can take readings on digital equipment without leaving his home.

It has been interesting watching the weather change throughout the years, comparing storms and tracking temperature fluctuations, he said.



Layton Munson was photographed in 2002 to commemorate 55 years service as a Cooperative Weather Observer. (Special to the Post)

But with his 90th birthday closing in, Munson is ready to hand over the job to someone younger.

"In the winter time we report how many inches of snow are on the ground. Last winter was pretty tough here. There was lots of snow on the ground and I can't get around in it, I couldn't walk in it. So this is it."

His wife, who helped him as he struggled through the snow is also ready for Munson to give up his volunteer work. "It took us both to wade through that snow and keep us top side up," she said. "I couldn't have picked him up if he fell."

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