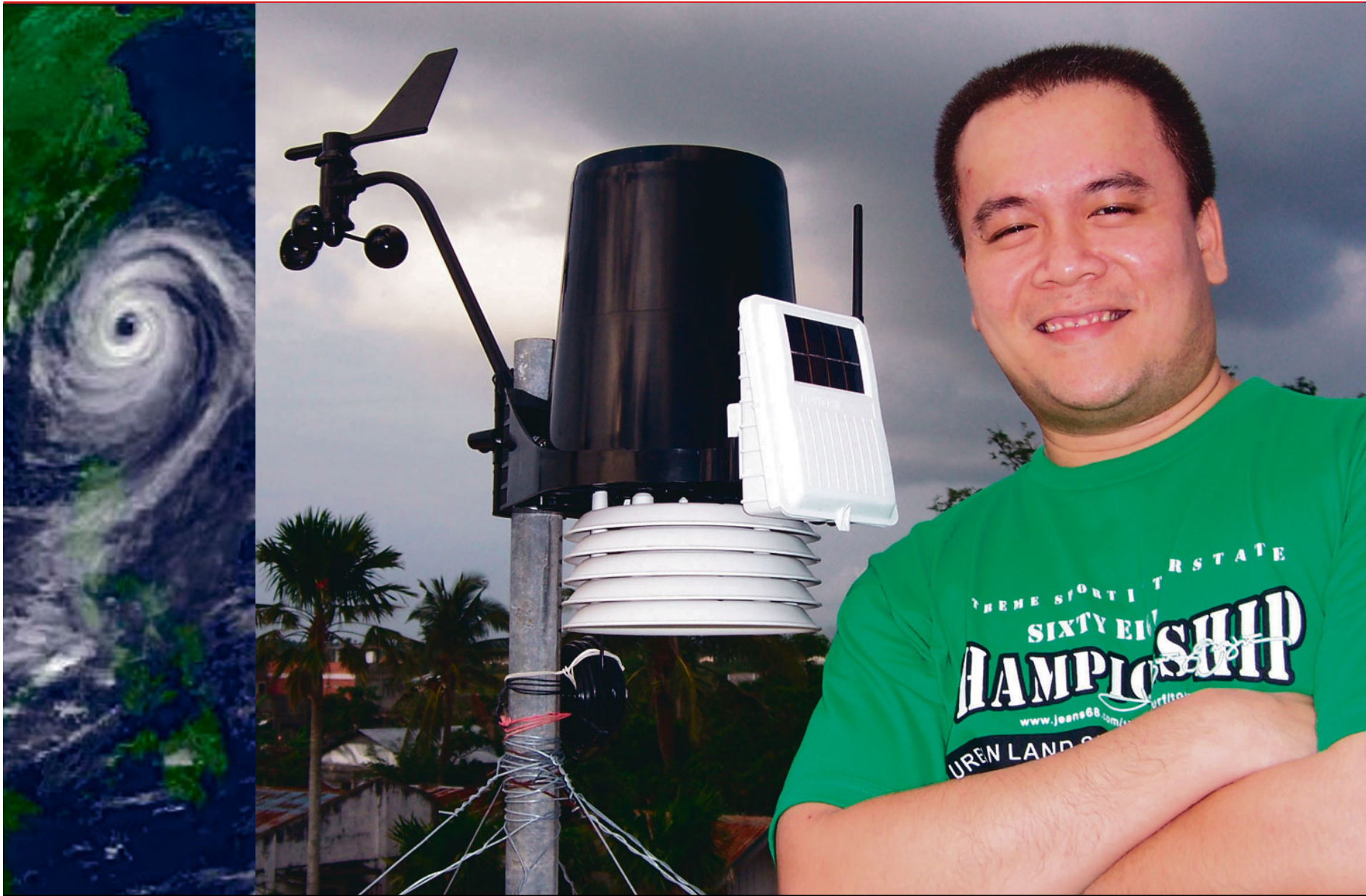


Please send feedback to  
jsarmiento@inquirer.com.ph

Editor Juan V. Sarmiento Jr.



**WEATHER MAN** Michael Padua stands beside a Davis Vantage Pro2, a weather device installed on his rooftop in Naga City. It can calculate wind speed, barometric pressure, temperature, humidity and rainfall.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Cyclones that visited the country in 2009
1. Tropical Depression "Auring" (Jan. 3 to 5)
2. Tropical Depression "Bising" (Feb. 2 to 10)
3. Tropical Depression "Crising" (May 2)
4. Typhoon "Dante" [Kujira] (April 29 to May 5)
5. Typhoon "Emong" [Chan-hom] (May 6 to 10)
6. Tropical Storm "Feria" [Nangka] (June 23 to 26)
7. Tropical Depression "Gorio" [Soudelor] (July 9)
8. Tropical Storm "Huaning" [06W] (July 13)
9. Tropical Storm "Isang" [Molave] (July 14 to 18)
10. Tropical Storm "Jolina" (July 30 to Aug. 2)
11. Typhoon "Kiko" [Morakot] (Aug. 3 to 7)
12. Tropical Storm "Labuyo" [Dujuan] (Sept. 2)
13. Tropical Depression "Maring" (Sept. 8 to 9)
14. Tropical Depression "Nando" (Sept. 12 to 13)
15. Tropical Storm "Ondoy" [Ketsana] (Sept. 24 to 27)
16. Typhoon/TS/TD "Pepeng" [Parma](Oct. 3 to 10)
17. Typhoon "Ramil" [Lupit] (Oct. 16 to 24)
18. Typhoon "Santi" [Mirinae] (Oct. 28)
19. Tropical Depression "Urduja" (Nov. 23 to 26)
20. Tropical Depression "Vinta" [Nida] (Dec. 3)

# Michael Padua: One-man weather center

By Alcuin Papa

IN THIS AGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE, STRONGER and more violent storms will be the norm rather than the exception, especially for vulnerable countries like the Philippines. The need for more accurate and quicker storm warnings becomes imperative for a country that gets hit by an average of 20 storms a year.

Naga City-based maverick meteorologist Michael Padua is trying to provide more accurate information on storms and, maybe along the way, change the way we look at the weather.

"In other countries like the US, the weather is part of their lives. In our country, we have our fatalistic *bahala na* [come-what-may] attitude. There is a lack of awareness," he said.

## Website

In 1997, Padua spent his own time and money to start the website typhoon2000.com as an alternative one-stop source of information for typhoons and provide more accurate weather forecasting.

The site, which Padua himself billed as the "The Philippines' first website on tropical cyclones," is a rich source of information on storms headed for the country.

It features typhoon tracks culled from other international weather agencies like the US Joint Typhoon Warning Center based in Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, the Japan Meteorological Agency and the National Weather Service in Guam.

The site also has Padua's own typhoon track and analysis based on his own research. "Weather forecasting is very technical. But on my website, I try to translate all the technical information into something the layman can understand, so that everyone can prepare for the coming storms," Padua said.

## Backup system

Padua also registered maybagyo.com, which also leads to the typhoon2000 website, as a backup system. "At least the site is accessible through either of the website addresses even if traffic is high," he said.

Typhoon2000.com now offers users fast weather information through text messaging. For a P2.50 fee, users of Smart, Globe and Sun can get the latest information on the weather. (See sidebar.)

The website is Padua's own

expression of his childhood fascination with typhoons. As a grade school student, Padua used to clip newspaper stories on storms. He said it helped that the area he grew up in was frequently visited by storms.

For his college degree at the University of the Philippines, Padua took BS Geography, the closest course to meteorology at that time. Padua said the degree program had subjects on climate and sharpened his knowledge of geographical locations, something he finds useful today.

## Thrill in tracking storm

When there is a storm, Padua has an adrenaline rush. "I find a thrill in the suspense of tracking a storm. My friends tell me that if I am sick, it seems I get my vitamins from tracking storms," he said.

With his laptop and mobile Internet connection, Padua manages to update his website every hour when an area is threatened, compared with the four-times-a-day updates from the website of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa).

Around 15 percent of users visiting his website are from the United States. He gets hits from Vietnam and Hong Kong as well.

"The advantage of my website is that I show the forecast of international weather agencies tracking the same storm," Padua said.

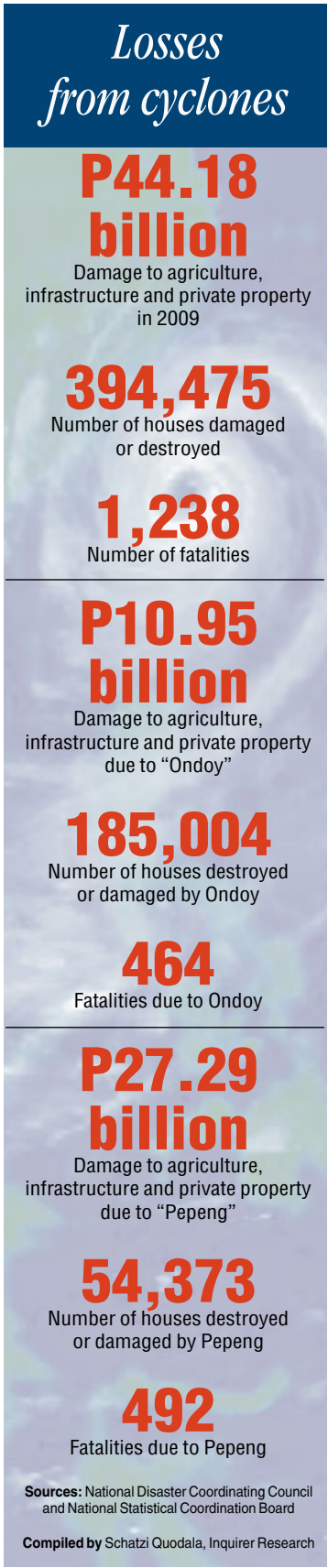
His website has a disclaimer that says his information should not be used to make life-and-death decisions. "Visitors to the site now have the option to plan their actions and make their own scenarios," he said.

## Graphics

Padua takes pride in his typhoon graphics that make weather forecasting easier to understand. "Visitors with no knowledge of meteorology and those who can't read maps will find my website useful. There is also more information like wind speed and rainfall.

But more than that, I think my site is more geographically precise since you can see the provinces and cities that will be affected by the storm," he said.

Because of his website and his forecasts, Padua has had his run-ins with Pagasa people. He remembers going to a seminar of Pagasa weather forecasters a few years ago and engaging one senior forecaster in what he described as a "stormy" conversation.



He lamented that government agencies like Pagasa were "still stuck in the Middle Ages" in terms of weather forecasting. In the early days, the Philippine weather forecasting system was the model for other countries, he said.

"Pagasa really needs more equipment. Weather forecasters need more training. Most of all, the agency should start entering the age of the Internet because there is a lot of free information out there on the Web. If I can do it through my website, why can't they? It seems they have not coped with advances in technology," Padua said.

## Watchdog

He maintains that he is not out to compete with Pagasa. In fact, he is open to helping Pagasa and the government.

"Maybe my website is Pagasa's fault. In a way, I wanted to be a watchdog of the weather bureau so it can improve. But what is important is making the information on coming storms available to the public not to scare everyone but for us to be prepared," he said.

The popularity of his website is a testament to the meticulous care Padua puts in his weather forecasting.

In 2004, he made a forecast that Cyclone "Uning" would hit Naga eight hours before it actually struck. Pagasa was predicting the storm would hit Northern Luzon. He told the local Pagasa branch about his assessment, but the agency would not change its forecast. He then called up Mayor Jessie Robredo, a family friend, who immediately convened an emergency meeting of the local disaster coordinating council.

"People were so relaxed, probably because of the prediction that the storm would not hit Naga City," he said. But the storm did come the next day, toppling power lines and stranding people. But no lives were lost, he said. This incident made Padua's name a byword in local weather forecasting.

## Surge after Ondoy

Hits on his website jumped after Tropical Storm "Ondoy" dumped rains on and flooded large parts of Metro Manila in September, according to Padua.

From up to 500,000 hits a day before Ondoy, his website was getting a million hits after the storm. As "Pepeng" closed in on the country, Padua said he was

getting as many as 3.5 million hits a day.

On Sept. 24, two days before Ondoy hit Luzon, Padua said he had noticed the wide area of rain clouds formed by the storm as it passed by Naga. At that time, Padua already raised the alarm that Central Luzon and Metro Manila would get as much as 200 millimeters of rain in a 12-hour span.

## Satellite images

Padua hardly sleeps when a typhoon he is tracking nears land. At around 2 a.m. of Sept. 26, he obtained satellite images confirming Ondoy's heavy rain clouds.

By 6 a.m., he said he noticed thick clouds in Rizal with winds pushing rain clouds ahead of the storm's center. By 8 a.m., the center of the storm was in Central Luzon while the rain clouds were in Metro Manila. Heavy rain fell on the metropolis and the rest is history.

"But I was still surprised with the amount of rainfall brought by the storm," he said.

## Separate agency

Despite the criticisms and the accolades, the portly Padua continues on with his work. He is advocating the formation of a separate agency that would focus solely on storms.

The agency, patterned after the US Hurricane Center, would also boost research on typhoons and do hazard mapping that could be disseminated to the local level.

## Typhoon preparedness

He is also busy with efforts to make Filipinos more conscious of the weather. He is currently the head of the Naga College Foundation's Typhoon Preparedness Center, which conducts research and seminars.

The center, which has only two staffers, has around 50 student volunteers and is the only one of its kind in the country.

Padua said he would like to see more of these efforts replicated in other areas frequently hit by storms.

Padua expressed hopes that his website could help the government and Pagasa become better at forecasting and make people more aware of the weather.

"My wish is for the country to be No. 1 in weather forecasting in the Pacific and elevate our preparedness for storms so fewer lives are lost," he said.

## Texting typhoon update

FOR TRAVELERS AND VACATIONERS on the go, typhoon2000.com offers a text messaging service for up-to-date weather forecasting. For P2.50 per text message, Mike Padua of typhoon2000.com said users could receive real-time daily alerts, weather advice and weather forecasting.

## Fast

"I decided to offer weather forecasting through text messaging so the information can reach the public faster. What faster way to get to information to users than through their cell phones," Padua said. With the P2.50 fee, subscribers can get three text messages worth of information.

The service is available for Smart and Talk and Text users through 216; Globe and TM users through 2800 and Sun users through 2288. Those wishing to avail themselves of the service can text "T2K HELP" through the specified number of their cell phone service providers. To start receiving alerts, users can text "T2K ON" to the numbers. Mobile cell phone owners can also get weather information on demand by texting "T2K Typhoon."

## Ask questions

Users can even ask Padua questions (like what is a cyclone) by texting "T2K ASK <question>." Padua said that like the data on his website, the information given through text messaging was "for info purposes only" and should not be used for life-and-death situations. Users can unsubscribe to the service by text "T2K OFF."

The service is being made available through a tie-up with Synermaxx, an information and communications solution provider. Padua receives a small fee for every text message sent to users and uses it to maintain his website. **Alcuin Papa**