

Pennsylvania groundhog 'predicts' early spring

By Associated Press

PUNXSUTAWNEY, Pa. – The handlers of Pennsylvania's most famous groundhog, Punxsutawney Phil, said the furry rodent failed to see his shadow at dawn Tuesday, meaning he "predicted" an early spring.

"Is this current warm weather more than a trend? Per chance this winter has come to an end? There is no shadow to be cast, an early Spring is my forecast!," read Jeff Lundy, vice president of the Inner Circle of The Punxsutawney Groundhog Club.

Lundy is one of the top hat-wearing group that announces the forecast every year.

A German legend has it that if a furry rodent sees his shadow on Feb. 2, winter will last another six weeks. If not, spring comes early.

The forecast was delivered with temperatures in the low 20s, on a clear day when the high temperature was expected to reach the unseasonably mild mid-40s.

The Inner Circle congratulated the mid-week crowd of about 10,000 revelers, which the group said was one of the largest for a weekday celebration. Many of those in attendance had stayed overnight and partied into the wee hours waiting for the groundhog's forecast.

Truth be told, Phil's handlers don't wait to see if he sees his shadow – which he almost certainly would have Tuesday. Instead, the Inner Circle decide on the forecast ahead of time and announce it on Gobbler's Knob, a tiny hill near the town

for which the groundhog is named, about 65 miles northeast of Pittsburgh.

Records going back to 1887 show Phil has now predicted more winter 102 times while forecasting an early spring just 18 times. There are no records for the remaining years.

Tuesday's celebration was billed as the 130th forecast by Phil.

In New York, Staten Island Chuck agreed with Phil: An early spring is coming.

The groundhog did not see his shadow as he emerged from his home at the Staten Island Zoo early Tuesday.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio missed this year's annual Groundhog Day commemoration. The Democrat had gone to Iowa to stump for Hillary Clinton for that state's caucus.

Traditionally, the city's mayor attends the festivities. De Blasio dropped the groundhog in 2014, the first year he attended the ceremony as mayor. The groundhog died a few months later.