



A handsome new home welcomes visitors to a world of nuclear history and science. (Photos: National Museum of Nuclear Science & History)

National nuclear museum reopens at new site in Albuquerque

A series of events kicks off the opening of the National Museum of Nuclear Science & History.



Albert Einstein made his presence felt during a black-tie-optional cocktail reception at the National Museum of Nuclear Science & History.

ALL THINGS NUCLEAR have landed in a new home in Albuquerque, N.M. The former National Atomic Museum reopened on April 4 as the National Museum of Nuclear Science & History on a 12-acre site next door to Kirtland Air Force Base. The museum, which is part of the Smithsonian Institution's affiliations program, has been designated by the U.S. Congress to disseminate information about nuclear science and its history.

The museum, housed in a new 30 000-ft² facility, features major exhibits on nuclear power, medicine, and weapons, uranium mining, and radiation. Replicas of the Fat Man and Little Boy atomic bombs used during World War II are the museum's best-known items. Other displays include a tiny sample of ekanite (which is an uncommon gemstone with a high thorium content), a cutaway model of the Superphénix reactor, and an assortment of comic books that highlight atomic-powered superheroes. Featured outside on the museum's still-unfinished grounds are a B-52 bomber and a 69-ft-tall Redstone rocket, along with other impres-

sive components that include military vehicles and the sail of the U.S.S. *James K. Polk* nuclear submarine.

The new facility incorporates 13 permanent indoor exhibit areas, two classrooms, a theater, a library, a conference room, a gallery for temporary exhibits, and a museum store. The theater has been named in honor of the American Nuclear Society, a museum sponsor.

Three events were held to celebrate the museum's grand opening in early April. The first was a black-tie-optional reception on the evening of April 2, at which patrons browsed casually among the exhibits under soft lights, with background music provided by a three-piece band.

The following morning, on a sunny but blustery day, a ribbon-cutting ceremony attracted more than 100 people. Leading up to the ceremony, museum officers and government officials made speeches about the significance of the facility's opening. The mayor of Albuquerque, Martin Chavez, declared it "a great day for Albuquerque," and Jim Walther, who has been the museum's director for the past 12 years, said that the opening of the new facility would not have been possible without the tireless work of volunteers, supporters, and staff. "The opening of our wonderful new facility is the culmination of years of effort by many people and



A couple strolls out to get a closer look at a B-29 bomber, one of the big attractions at the site.

different organizations," Walther said. "We can now display so much more of what we have in our collection, as well as expand our programs and events."

Following the speeches, the new facility was given a Native American blessing by Albert Smith, a Navajo Indian who served

in the U.S. Marine Corps during World War II. Smith was one of only a few "windtalkers," the servicemen who developed codes based on their native language to transmit secret tactical messages over military telephone and by radio communications.

The museum's third event, a preview of



Government officials, museum officers, and others help cut the ribbon during grand-opening ceremonies. Pictured, from left, are Aaron Glavas, of Smithsonian Affiliates; Dorothy Davidson, of Areva; Ike Richardson, of Los Alamos National Laboratory; Don Brunell, of the National Nuclear Security Administration; Sarah Cobb, of U.S. Sen. Tom Udall's office; Albuquerque Mayor Martin Chavez; Tom Hunter, of Sandia National Laboratories; Jim Walther, museum director; Chuck Loeber, a member of the museum's board of trustees; Amy Wood, of U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman's office; and Antonio Sandoval, of U.S. Rep. Martin Heinrich's office.

exhibits for its members, followed the ribbon cutting. The museum then officially opened to the general public amid fanfare the next day, April 4.

The museum was established in 1969 as the Sandia Base Weapons Museum in a facility located on Kirtland Air Force Base. In 1971 its name was changed to the National Atomic Museum. In 1991 it received its charter as a national museum, and its mission was expanded to include aspects of nuclear science and history beyond the manufacturing of nuclear weapons.

After the terrorist events of September 11, 2001, increased security measures restricted the public's access to the museum's on-base site and forced its relocation to a site in Albuquerque's Old Town museum district. The museum had a successful run in Old Town and received about 70 000 visitors annually while at that location.

The museum has added more attractions at the new location, including interactive and touch-screen devices such as "Radiation 101," which can be used to determine the user's exposure to radiation, and "Energy Encounters," which tests users on various sources of energy and the costs associated with them. A popular exhibit brought to the new museum is "Little Albert's Lab," which features a child-size animatronic Albert Einstein that teaches the fundamentals of his famous formula, $E=mc^2$.



On the museum's opening day, a young family learns about static energy. A small arc of electricity flows between the big silver orb, which is an electrostatic generator, and the miniature silver orb that the boy is holding. The exhibit is part of the museum's mobile outreach program.

The museum will continue to run its summer day camp for children. During the season, about 300 campers attend each day to learn about ecology, robotics, flight, engi-

neering, medicine, and general science.

The museum is located at 601 Eubank Blvd. S.E., in Albuquerque. Its Web address is <www.nuclearmuseum.org>. **NN**