

UAF Life Sciences Facility gets formal launch with groundbreaking ceremony

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FAIRBANKS — Brian Barnes likes the analogy that education opens doors to the future. And the director of the University of Alaska Fairbanks Institute of Arctic Biology knows exactly how many — 203 — will be located in the new Life Sciences Facility.

The new \$109 million science facility was formally launched with a ceremonial groundbreaking Wednesday, bringing a building that has been planned and dreamed about for more than a decade a step closer to reality.

"I want to promise you, everyone one of those doors is going to be open to every undergraduate who goes here," Barnes told a crowd that had gathered at the West Ridge building site on a blustery afternoon.

Scores of people at took turns wielding ceremonial golden shovels and donning blue hard hats to officially kick off the project.

The facility has been in the works for the past 12 years, surviving four name changes and numerous failed funding schemes before it was approved by voters as part of a nearly \$400 million education bond package last November. The estimated completion date of the facility is spring 2013, with building occupancy planned for the following fall semester.

"We're more than ready to get started," UAF Chancellor Brian Rogers said.

The Life Sciences Facility will add new classroom and office space to campus, along with cutting-edge lab facilities and an auditorium. Most of the natural science buildings at UAF date back to the 1960s, and it's the first new teaching and lab facility constructed on campus in 17 years.

It'll also provide an immediate economic boost to Fairbanks, with 370 employees and about \$80 million in wages tied to the project.

Joe Hayes, executive director of the UAF Alumni Association, remembers lobbying for the facility when he served as a legislator in 2000. He had company at the reception — former lawmakers John Davies, Gail Phillips, Tom Moyer, Jay Ramras and Mike Kelly watched as their former pet project finally became a reality.

The crowd included former Chancellor Marshall Lind, who remembers Life Sciences being a campus priority even when he took over at UAF in 1999.

"I'm very, very happy to see this finally happen," Hayes said. "This is

going to be such a boon to the Fairbanks campus, not to mention the research community.”

Kelly remembers it as the rare project that virtually everyone — Interior legislators, UAF officials and UA regents — could get behind.

“Sometimes they don’t sing the same tune,” Kelly said. “They did on this one — they were united.”

An Anchorage firm, Davis Constructors and Engineers, was selected to build the project in January. The building is to be at the former site of two research greenhouses, which were removed to make space for the building. Those will be replaced by a new greenhouse, located south of the Arctic Health Building, set to open in October.

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