



Underground Research Facility

630 E. Summit St. Lead, SD 57754

South Dakota Science and Technology Authority

www.sanfordlab.org

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Contact:

Constance Walter, Communications Director
Sanford Underground Research Facility
605.722.4025 (office); 402.560.6116 (cell)
cwalter@sanfordlab.org

SDSTA dedicates Rounds Operations Center

New operations facility was named for Senator M. Michael Rounds to honor his leadership in the creation of the Sanford Underground Research Facility

LEAD, SD— On August 20, 2021, the South Dakota Science and Technology Authority (SDSTA) dedicated the Rounds Operation Center (ROC) to honor former Governor and current U.S. Senator Mike Rounds for his efforts to bring Sanford Underground Research Facility (SURF) to South Dakota. The dedication was followed by a ribbon cutting ceremony and a picnic luncheon for staff and guests.

Rounds, who was governor of South Dakota as efforts ramped up to secure the Homestake Gold Mine as a future underground research laboratory, thanked the SDSTA for the recognition and pointed to the partnerships that made the creation of SURF possible.

“The joy of discovery is not something we get when we do things alone. You get it when you do things with other people,” said Rounds. “This undertaking brought together the scientific community, political community, engineering community and technological community. In the end, it took people who want to get things done, setting their differences aside and working together.”

“It was a daunting task to obtain the property and turn a mile deep wet hole into a world-class science facility,” said Casey Peterson, chairperson of the SDSTA Board of Directors. “Our honored guest shone through all of this. He told us not to give up; he supported us. His relationships with the science community and understanding of the state legislature made this happen.”

In the early 2000s, negotiations were underway to turn the former Homestake Gold Mine in Lead into an underground research laboratory. The venture would require a large investment and many risks. Rounds was determined to bring a world-leading research laboratory to South Dakota. In 2006, Rounds and the South Dakota Legislature took a bold step, appropriating \$45.5 million dollars toward the project.

That initial investment helped secure \$70 million from philanthropist T. Denny Sanford and a land donation from Barrick Gold Corporation. A \$10 million HUD grant secured by then-U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson provided some of the initial funding for the transition of the Homestake Mine and SURF was born. SURF is managed by the SDSTA.

Lieutenant Governor Larry Rhoden discussed the enthusiasm around the idea of an underground research facility in South Dakota. “Rounds understood the impact a facility like this would have on the state of South Dakota and on the future of science and technology,” Rhoden said.

Kevin Lesko, senior scientist at Berkeley Lab and an early advocate of the creation of SURF said of the early years, “I remember meeting with Governor Rounds early on in his office and telling him that this was not going to be easy. But the support, community and faith we had from the state of South Dakota convinced me that this was the place to do it.”

The 26,000-square-foot facility serves as the hub for SURF operations activities and includes the maintenance shop, a central warehouse facility and office space for operations and engineering staff. The \$6.5 million needed to build the facility was provided by former Governor Dennis Daugaard and current Governor Kristi Noem across two future fund grants. The ROC was designed by Williams & Associates Architecture, Inc. and constructed by a contractor team led by Dean Kurtz Construction of Rapid City, South Dakota.

“The leadership of former Governor Daugaard and current Governor Noem allowed us to reach this milestone. We are grateful for their support over the years,” said Mike Headley, executive director of the SDSTA and lab director for SURF.

The ROC provides SURF staff with the facility and tools needed to safely operate and maintain the deepest underground science facility in the United States—and one of the leading underground science laboratories in the world.

“Creating a world-class research facility requires an incredible amount of work and endless persistence on the part of many dedicated people,” Headley said. “We are grateful to Senator Rounds for his visionary leadership in making SURF ‘the next big thing’ in South Dakota and for so many others who continue to support our efforts.”

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