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Breaking ground

Environmentally friendly backhoe takes first scoop at site of bioproducts lab

By Mary Hopkin
Herald staff writer

Traditionally, dignitaries use gold-painted shovels for ground-breaking ceremonies.

But more appropriately, a biodiesel-powered backhoe scooped out the first bucket of dirt during Thursday's ground breaking of the Washington State University Tri-Cities' new Bioproducts, Sciences

See the video at: tricityherald.com

Budget woes

Stability key at Hanford, Gregoire says. **B1.**

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Len Peters, Pacific Northwest National Laboratory director, addresses the crowd during the ground-breaking ceremony Thursday for the new Bioproducts, Sciences & Engineering Laboratory at Washington State University Tri-Cities.

Ground: PNNL donating $9 million of equipment to lab

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& Engineering Laboratory.

Gov. Chris Gregoire, who spoke at the event, said the new laboratory will help Washington create new markets and industry in the bioproducts fields that will benefit the Mid-Columbia, the state and the nation.

The $24 million research and teaching laboratory is being built through a partnership between Washington State University and the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

It will give researchers a place to develop technology to convert agriculture by-products and residues into plastics, solvents, fibers, pharmaceuticals and fuel additives.

"We'll be taking today's waste and turning it into viable products," Gregoire said.

The laboratory will help create whole new markets and industries in the Mid-Columbia and state, and help establish the Tri-Cities as a center of science and engineering, she said.

Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., said the project is a great investment for the Mid-Columbia and the state.

"Today is no less important than the original ground breaking at Hanford," she said.

PNNL has been working with WSU to build the laboratory since 2002, and last year Gregoire put $13.1 million into the capital budget to fund construction of the lab, also known as BSEL.

Construction on the 57,000-square-foot building, being built on 1¼ acres at WSU Tri-Cities in Richland, will begin within the next few weeks. PNNL is donating $9 million of equipment to the laboratory.

By fall 2007, WSU students and staff will be sharing the building with PNNL staff.

"This is the kind of science that will change the way we think," said WSU President Lane Rawlins. "It will make a difference for things much larger.

Len Peters, director of PNNL, said the laboratory will not only be a magnet to draw prominent scientists to the Mid-Columbia, but it also will help make Northwest agriculture and food processors more competitive.

John Plaza, president of Seattle Biodiesel, said the center will push WSU to the forefront of bioproduct research and development.

"It primes Washington to be a leader in the nation," Plaza said.

At a meeting of the Tri-City Industrial Development Council after the groundbreaking, Rawlins added more praise.

The new lab, he told a crowd of about 200 at the Three Rivers Convention Center, is "symbolic of an advancing effort to apply the research and make sure it hits the ground, to make sure it has the potential to change the world."

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Work begins on Bioproducts, Science & Engineering Laboratory

Herald photos/Richard Dickin

Gov. Chris Gregoire speaks to a crowd gathered for the ground-breaking ceremony Thursday for the new Bioproducts, Sciences & Engineering Laboratory at Washington State University Tri-Cities. Construction on the 57,000-square-foot building in Richland is to begin within the next few weeks. More photos of the ceremony are available online.