

U.S. Department of Energy  
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 Waste Isolation Pilot Plant  
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# DOENews

*To Beasts*

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**Joe Skeen, Louis Whitlock and Wendell Weart Honored  
 As New DOE Carlsbad Area Office Dedicated**

**CARLSBAD, N.M., December 16, 1997** – Local, state and federal dignitaries honored U.S. Rep. Joe Skeen, former state Sen. Louis Whitlock and scientist Dr. Wendell D. Weart today during ceremonies dedicating the new office building housing the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Carlsbad Area Office.

Property owner and developer John C. Harvey christened the building the Skeen-Whitlock Building and the auditorium at the northeast corner of the building the Weart Auditorium.

Harvey is president and founder of The Cowperwood Company, contracted to design and build the 85,000-square-foot facility. During the dedication, he also unveiled bronze plaques bearing the names of the building and auditorium, located at 4021 National Parks Highway. The event took place during a ribbon cutting and grand opening.

The Skeen-Whitlock Building brings together 300 DOE and contractor employees previously housed at the WIPP site 26 miles east of Carlsbad and in three buildings in town. The structure also features a public reading room and educational displays in the lobby area. The Weart Auditorium seats 150 people.

Harvey, a Carlsbad native and son of former Carlsbad Mayor H. C. Harvey, owns the property and leases it to the U.S. General Services Administration for use by the DOE's Carlsbad Area Office. The Carlsbad Area Office administers the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant and National Transuranic Waste programs.

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"It's a real honor to dedicate this beautiful new facility in the names of Joe Skeen and Louis Whitlock," said Harvey. "These men have dedicated many years to supporting the Department of Energy and the WIPP. It is befitting, therefore, that this structure bear their names."

Dr. Weart, dubbed by former Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary as the "Sultan of Salt," has devoted 38 years to the scientific study of underground physics and nuclear waste technology.

"Many refer to Dr. Weart as the grandfather of WIPP," Harvey said. "His steady hand has guided the science of WIPP since 1975, and that science is what we recognize here today."

Weart directed WIPP site evaluation studies and research on interaction of radioactive waste with the geologic environment. The result is worldwide validation of the science that has transformed the WIPP into a viable repository for defense-generated transuranic nuclear waste.

Skeen, a staunch supporter of the DOE's Carlsbad Area Office and national defense and environmental restoration programs, spearheaded efforts to open the WIPP as the nation's first repository for permanent disposal of transuranic radioactive wastes.

He led Congress in passage of the WIPP Land Withdrawal Act of 1992. In 1996, he sponsored legislation to amend the Act, removing duplicative regulatory requirements and setting the WIPP on a timely schedule to begin disposal operations.

Whitlock, a long-time Carlsbad resident, played a key role in bringing the WIPP to the salt beds of southeastern Eddy County. In the early 1970s, he was among a group of local leaders who contacted federal officials about the possibility of establishing a nuclear waste repository in the area.

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Since then, Whitlock has been an integral part of the community effort pushing the WIPP down the path to success. As a state senator, he worked closely with other legislators to build support for the project.

"Joe Skeen and Louis Whitlock have been true leaders in their work on behalf of the DOE and the WIPP," said George Dials, manager of the Carlsbad Area Office. "I can't think of two people more deserving of this honor.

"Wendell Weart's dedication to the WIPP project and his work in nuclear waste technology are legendary in the scientific world. He has won the respect and admiration of the entire scientific community."

The WIPP is designed to permanently dispose of transuranic radioactive waste left from the research and production of nuclear weapons. Located in southeastern New Mexico, 26 miles east of Carlsbad, project facilities include disposal rooms excavated in an ancient, stable salt formation 2,150 feet underground. Transuranic waste consists of clothing, tools, rags and other disposable items contaminated with trace amounts of radioactive elements, mostly plutonium.

The National Transuranic Waste Program administers a nationwide plan for storing, characterizing, packaging, transporting, and disposing of transuranic waste. Defense-generated transuranic waste is temporarily stored at 10 major generator/storage sites and several small-quantity sites nationwide.

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