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**Science and Technology Innovation Center opens, ushering in a new era of STEM education**

Written by UW-River Falls

Monday, Jan. 26 marked a day years in the making when the University of Wisconsin-River Falls new Science and Technology Innovation Center (SciTech) opened for its first day of classes.

“We had about two years of design and two and a half years of construction,” said Alan Symicek, chief facilities officer at UWRF. “So this is really exciting to see students in here today.”

Symicek said energy conservation was a major focus of the state-of-the-art facility. The building is also designed to be flexible so that it can be adapted to changing science and technology far into the future.

"I fully expect this building to be here 100 years from now serving our students,” Symicek said.

Another special feature is interior windows that give a view into the labs and classrooms.

"The theme of the building is science on display,” Symicek said. “We want people to be able to walk down the corridor, see what's going on in rooms and get excited about it.”

SciTech features 32 undergraduate research spaces, 12 instructional labs and flexible student and faculty collaboration spaces. The building is the new home of hands-on learning opportunities in [**biology**](https://students.uwrf.edu/biology), [**chemistry**](https://students.uwrf.edu/chem), [**physics**](https://students.uwrf.edu/physics) and [**psychological sciences**](https://students.uwrf.edu/psyc) at UWRF. It also houses the new [**University Business Collaboration Center**](https://www.uwrf.edu/about/university-business-collaboration-center) (UBCC), designed to accelerate collaboration and partnerships with businesses in STEM fields and beyond.

Teagan Gazdzik, a sophomore physics and Spanish major from St. Cloud, Minn., was one of the first students in the building Monday for an 8 a.m. class - Math for Physics and Engineering II. He’ll spend most of his time in SciTech this semester.

“This is amazing,” Gazdzik said. “This was one of the things that drew me into River Falls. I knew I was going to major in something related to physics or engineering. Getting in here this semester is really special.”

Karl Peterson, dean of UWRF’s College of Arts and Sciences, said the opening of SciTech was a day the faculty had been looking forward to as much as the students.

“Our faculty are extraordinary teachers and scholars, and SciTech gives them the modern tools and spaces they need to take an already exceptional academic experience to the next level,” Peterson said. “This facility supports the kind of collaborative, inquiry-driven teaching that defines UWRF, ensuring our students are challenged, supported and inspired every day.”

Rick Foy, assistant chancellor for University Advancement, said generous donations helped make SciTech a reality.

“On this historic opening day of SciTech, we acknowledge the many donors who generously supported this transformational project,” Foy said. “Led by a $1 million gift from Jeff and Kristi Cernohous, UWRF ’94, our donors made it possible for us to meet our goal of $5 million as part of the university’s financial commitment to the $117 million facility. On behalf of all of us at UWRF, I express deep appreciation to all our contributors. We look forward to publicly honoring donors at SciTech’s grand opening on Tuesday, March 31.”

The community will be invited to tour SciTech during the grand opening celebration from 4 to 6 p.m.