

Time capsule celebrates new South Pole station

By Mark Sabbatini

Sun staff

The new South Pole station isn't finished yet, but it's already history.

A time capsule intended to be opened January 2050 - a few years beyond the station's expected life span - was placed in one of the building's support beams Friday. The wooden box contains literature about the South Pole and U.S. Antarctic Program, a poster of the new station signed by Pole employees and other items designed to capture life in 2002.

See Time on page 6



Photo by Andy Martinez/Special to The Antarctic Sun

Officials at the South Pole, above, place a time capsule into a protective case during a ceremony Friday. The capsule, at left, contains documents about the new Pole station being constructed and other mementos from the U.S. Antarctic Program.



Photo by Mark Sabbatini/The Antarctic Sun

Time From page 1

Officials originally hoped to place the time capsule in 2000 or 2001 to coincide with the new millennium, but the length of the planning process prevented that, said Jerry Marty, the National Science Foundation representative at Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station.

"There was a lot of debate about what to put in it," he said.

This is the South Pole's second official time capsule. The first was placed on New Year's Day 1957 by the construction crew that built and occupied the first South Pole station. The capsule was a cylinder from a Caterpillar tractor donated by the city of Peoria, Ill., which contained a newspaper and other materials from the time. The capsule was supposed to be opened in the year 2000, but Marty said records are sketchy and many of those who helped bury it are deceased.

"We don't know where it is," he said.

Marty said he is unsure of all the steps that will be taken to ensure the time capsule's recovery. But he said he hopes media accounts about the capsule, a plaque describing it that will be placed in the new station and the memory of current employees who want to return for its opening will be sufficient.

"One may have to dig for it, but it will be a confirmed location," he said.

The capsule - which is only somewhat bigger than a breadbox - was built by Gary Rochford, a carpenter from Seattle who is working his third season in Antarctica. He said some hardwood arrived in a shipment earlier this season "so I just pulled out some red oak and fashioned a box."

"I felt quite privileged to work on it," he said. "It was just a neat shop project. They don't come along that often."

There was some debate among officials about the size of the capsule due to questions such as how much would be placed in the capsule and whether items such as posters would be rolled or folded, said Katy Jensen, the South Pole station's area manager. She said they eventually decided to go with a smaller design.

"We wanted to limit the amount of stuff we put into it," she said.

Among the items in the capsule:

- A poster of the new station signed by Pole employees.
- A copy of this year's Science Planning Summary, which provides details about all of the U.S. research bases and ships, plus descriptions of every science project occurring this year and who is participating in the research.
- A patch from the past winter showing what part of the station was being worked on at that time. Also included is a second patch given to all employees from the past winter and others who helped with the high-profile evacuation of Dr. Ron Shemenski. Jensen said only 100 of the patches were made.
- A baseball cap with a Facilities, Engineering, Maintenance and Construction acronym (FEMC). The design was selected over a

more generic Antarctic or South Pole theme because "those are the folks who built the station," Jensen said.

- A copy of the station guide for the current season, which provides extensive details about the station's facilities and employee policies. Jensen said amusing historical details can be found by going back only 17 years to the 1985 guide, which bragged about the station's two computers (for scientists only) and the ability to send teletype messages.

- An issue of National Geographic from 1957 that focused on the establishment of a permanent base at the South Pole. The issue included the final article by Antarctic explorer Richard E. Byrd, who made the first flight over the Pole, and another article by Paul Siple, who established the station and was its first scientific leader.

Employees at the station had plenty of other ideas about what could be included.

"You could freeze-dry some of the meals and you could have little descriptions of what we ate because pretty soon (this galley) will be gone," said Mike Toomey, a first-year dining attendant from Colorado Springs, Colo.

Rochford, the capsule's builder, said "I think for sure a photo CD. They issue one to us at the end of every season." But, he added, in 50 years the technology to read the disc of photos from the station might not exist any longer.

Some said reminders of the ironies and difficulties of life at the Pole needed to be included.

"Flight schedules with crosses through all the ones canceled just to remind ourselves how slow it was back then," said Tony Travouillon, a scientist from Sydney who is spending his first season on the Ice.

Answer to puzzle from page 2

Among the other suggestions from employees were pay stubs, a vial of air from the clean air sector (an area so pure that even people are banned as a possible pollutant) and a piece of the South Pole dome, which will be dismantled when the new station is complete.

Jensen is encouraging employees to return in year 2050 for the opening of the time capsule and a number of workers interviewed said they'd be interested.

"It would be great to see how this place has changed in 50 years," said Craig Isenberg, a first-year communications operator from Yosemite, Calif. "Also, it'd be nice to still be alive then."

