

Press release

18 October 2011

Dedication ceremony for the Virgin Galactic Gateway to Space

A dedication ceremony was held yesterday at Spaceport America in New Mexico - the world's first commercial space terminal. More than 800 guests attended the event, which included flying displays of Virgin Galactic's WhiteKnightTwo and SpaceShipTwo vehicles.

The Virgin Galactic Gateway to Space, a combined terminal and hangar facility, will support up to two WhiteKnightTwo and five SpaceShipTwo vehicles. The 120,000 square-foot building has been designed by Foster + Partners, working with URS Corporation and New Mexico architects SMPC.

The Gateway will also house all astronaut preparation and celebration facilities, a mission control centre and a friends and family area. Entrance is via a deep channel cut into the landscape and its retaining walls form an exhibition space that documents a history of space exploration alongside the story of the region.

With minimal embodied carbon and few additional energy requirements, the scheme has been designed to achieve LEED Gold accreditation.

The low-lying form is dug into the landscape to exploit the thermal mass, which buffers the building from the extremes of the New Mexico climate as well as catching the westerly winds for ventilation; and maximum use is made of daylight via skylights. Built using local materials and construction techniques, it aims to be both sustainable and sensitive to its surroundings.

"Today is another history-making day for Virgin Galactic. We are here with a group of incredible people who are helping us lead the way in creating one of the most important new industrial sectors of the 21st century. We've never wavered in our commitment to the monumental task of pioneering safe, affordable and clean access to space, or to demonstrate that we mean business at each step along the way."

Sir Richard Branson

Notes for editors:

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Virgin Galactic, owned by Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Group and Aabar Investments PJS, is on track to be the world's first commercial spaceline. The new spaceship (SpaceshipTwo, VSS Enterprise) and carrier craft (WhiteKnightTwo, VMS Eve) have both been developed for Virgin Galactic by Mojave-based Scaled Composites.

Founded by Burt Rutan, Scaled developed SpaceShipOne, which in 2004 claimed the \$10m Ansari X Prize as the world's first privately developed manned spacecraft. Virgin Galactic's new vehicles share much of the same basic design, but are being built to carry six customers, or the equivalent scientific research payload, on sub-orbital space flights, allowing an out-of-the-seat, zero-gravity experience and offering astounding views of the planet from the black sky of space for tourist astronauts and a unique microgravity platform for researchers. The VSS Enterprise and VMS Eve test flight program is well under way, leading to Virgin Galactic commercial operations, which will be based at Spaceport America in New Mexico.

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