

# Naval research facility plans undersea tech center at URI

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University of Rhode Island President Robert Carothers, left, and Malcolm Spaulding, URI professor of ocean engineering, take part in yesterday's State House announcement.

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PROVIDENCE — The Naval Undersea Warfare Center, a military research agency in Newport, announced plans yesterday to establish a research and development center at the University of Rhode Island, an attempt to intensify collaboration with university and industry scientists throughout the country. Using Narragansett Bay as its principal laboratory, the Center of Excellence in Undersea Technology will develop improved methods for marine surveillance and for supporting Navy submarines.

State officials say the center will also produce dual-use technologies to be marketed as consumer products for aquaculture and other industries, and

conduct research to help establish sustainable fishing methods and control pollution.

“This is a tremendous undertaking that no one institution can do alone,” Donald Aker, technical operations manager at the Navy’s research facility in Newport, said yesterday at a State House news conference.

Although this is the first Navy-sponsored undersea technology center, the military has long collaborated with universities and private companies in Rhode Island as part of its mission to maintain U.S. superiority in undersea warfare and improve homeland security.

Last year, the Naval Undersea Warfare Center issued \$103 million in contracts to private companies in the state, according to spokesman David Sanders.

Research involving URI faculty has also been common.

The university was one of the first in the country to be named a Sea Grant College, in 1971, as part of a federal program introduced by former Rhode Island Sen. Claiborne Pell to bolster marine and coastal studies. Today, one-fourth of the 2,600 civilian employees at the Newport facility are URI graduates.

The new center will not be housed in a special building at URI, and neither the Navy nor the university have dedicated a full-time staff. The initial investment from the Navy is only \$150,000.

But university and military officials say the center will play an invaluable role in coordinating research priorities and producing partnerships to solve technological challenges.

The new center, Sanders said, will organize regular meetings among professors, Navy scientists and researchers at companies such as Raytheon and Electric Boat.

“We are building up more scientific capacity,” Governor Carcieri said at yesterday’s announcement, attended by Sen. Jack Reed, Representatives Patrick J. Kennedy and James R. Langevin, and URI President Robert L. Carothers. “I want to thank the Navy for their confidence in our university.”

At URI, the center will be run by Malcolm L. Spaulding, a professor of ocean engineering and an expert in marine environmental modeling, and Kate Moran, an associate dean at URI's Graduate School of Oceanography, who has documented past periods of global warming by collecting sediment cores in the Arctic.

The center held its first meeting in February, and URI professors are already pursuing 10 joint ventures, including research into anti-corrosion technology and harnessing power from wave action.

Spaulding said the Navy unveiled a list of potential technologies, and about 70 scientists immediately began proposing solutions and identifying possible collaborations.

One project — the designing of undersea sensors that look and move like jellyfish — has already engaged scientists at URI and Providence College and a local company that has developed computer software that models ocean currents and dispersal.

"We don't have very many forums where that happens," Spaulding said in an interview yesterday.

Professors at MIT and the University of Southern California will also participate in the research , as well as scientists from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, in Massachusetts, and scientists at other universities and private companies.

"Rhode Island is the Ocean State," Kennedy said, "and today we capitalize on that."

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