

WOL Open House and Armed Forces Day Reminiscing By Frank Koubek

Recently, I came across several plastics letters openers, which were souvenirs from by-gone days of WOL Armed Forces Day and Open House events. Do you remember those Saturday affairs in May when the Laboratory opened its doors to family, friends, and neighbors to come see and to get a taste of what we were all about at White Oak?

The plastics letter openers were given to visitors to the Plastics Laboratory (Building 70) as they watched the openers being molded on one of our injection molding machines. (To refresh your memory, a photo copy of the letter opener is included below.) Some years we made letter openers, other years we made ash trays, and, I believe, one time we made medallions, all with the NOL or NSWC logo molded into them.

The highlight of my open house experiences came in 1960 when I was asked to prepare an elaborate display/demonstration at Building 339 where in we show cased our newly developed high temperature materials testing equipment. The main feature was our hydrogen-oxygen rocket motor operating at full power where in we tested candidate rocket nozzle materials as well as nose cone materials in the exhaust plume. Visitors viewed the rocket in operation via a very large rectangular mirror. We erected the mirror and also a high chain link fence to keep visitors out of harms way. (This came about weeks prior to Open House Day when the Open House Committee and Captain Coleman (our CO) were impressed by the demonstration and okayed the mirror and fence installation using open house funds!!) Visitors were also briefed on our other test equipments by way of an informal presentation, movies, and slides in the front half of Building 339. Our equipment played a major role in the development of rocket motor insulation, nozzle materials, reentry nose cones, and heat shields for Polaris/Poseidon and Trident Missile materials development programs.

The Plastics Laboratory and High Temperature Materials Test Facilities were just two of the many, many stops for visitors on Open House Day. There were demonstrations and displays throughout the area, too many to list all of them here; but I do remember displays of major WOL development projects such as SUBROC, Mk 48 Torpedo, various mine development projects, etc. There were tours and demonstrations in the Building 20 Environmental Test Laboratories as well as the Wind Tunnels, the Ballistics Ranges, and the Explosives and Pyrotechnics development areas. Also, the X-ray nondestructive testing and magnetic's areas and the metals R&D building, etc. were on the tour.

And, for the hungry and thirsty, the Cafeteria was open to serve up lunch at a reasonable price. I believe buses from the motor pool shuttled visitors all over to glimpse the magnificent work we were doing. To me, it was always a day to take pride by showing family and friends what we were doing to support the fleet.

This is but a brief reminisce about our open house days. Perhaps you have some interesting recollections to tell about. Send your inputs to the LEAF.