

Hanford laboratory eyed by Hollywood, others

By WANDA BRIGGS

Herald staff writer

Imagine a Hanford laboratory becoming a sound stage for Hollywood movies.

That's a stretch — perhaps even a far reach — but a sound stage for the "entertainment industry" and a broad range of other uses are being considered for the 240,000-square-foot Fuels and Materials Examination Facility, which was built a decade ago to support the United States' breeder reactor program.

The Department of Energy has put FMEF on the market and is advertising for companies to buy or lease one of Hanford's most conspicuous "white elephants," — or one of the site's most sophisticated state-of-the-art buildings — depending on your viewpoint.

Construction began in the late 1970s. DOE's plan was to use the laboratory for fuel experiments for the nation's breeder reactor technology program.

But the breeder program was canceled during the Reagan Administration, and FMEF — like the adjacent Fast Flux Test Facility (FFTF)

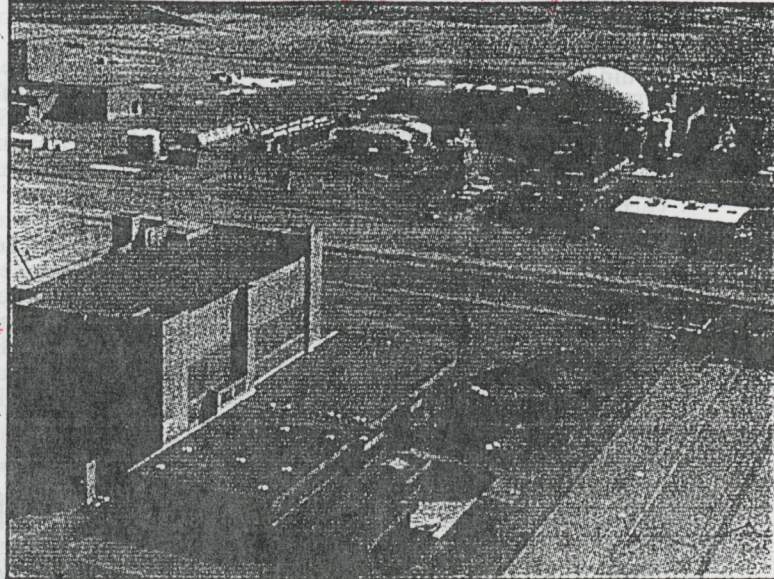


Photo courtesy Department of Energy

The Fuels and Materials Examination Facility (FMEF), in foreground, was completed in 1984, but never used for its purpose as a fuel experiments laboratory. Today, FMEF, which sits adjacent to the Fast Flux Test Facility, in background, is for sale.

— became an expensive reminder of this nation's ability to change its political mind.

For years, FFTF had other chores to do for Hanford, but FMEF had

few uses. And now FFTF also has been shut down.

The still brand-new FMEF contains such things as process hot

Please see FMEF, Page A2 ►

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This is for real. I really think we (Chris's sound studio, Fremont Fine Arts Foundry, Zombie, Hanford Nuclear Sculpture Wks, Dale's CCD II Lab, The Hafler Trio, et al) should write a proposal and bid at least \$50.00 to make this the cultural center of planet earth — hundreds of artists from across the globe, working in every medium, would come to Hanford to make art. I'm not joking; think about it. ask Peter.

June

over

FMEF

Continued from Page A1

cells, nondestructive examination facilities, repair and maintenance areas and a long list of additional features that are being offered to would-be users.

The building sits 98 feet above ground — which equals a seven-story office building — and 35 feet below ground, with an attached mechanical equipment wing on the west side, and an entry wing across the south side.

DOE and Westinghouse Hanford Co., the department's prime contractor at Hanford, believe FMEF too valuable with too many potential uses to become the target of a wrecking ball.

So, Westinghouse is trying to generate interest from throughout the nation and even the world.

"We want to transfer this facility to commercial use to help reduce Hanford's mortgage and aid the diversification of the local economy," said Westinghouse President LaMar Trego.

"This will help direct scarce dollars to the cleanup program where it is needed most and eliminate taxpayer funding for a building we no longer need but have been spending money to maintain," he added.

Westinghouse put FMEF on the market earlier this month, asking for "expressions of interest" until the end of April, after which Westinghouse and DOE will meet with those who are interested to discuss details.

Already, there has been a wide range of interest, said Mike Minette of Westinghouse.

"We're looking for light industrial or heavy industrial uses. We are targeting manufacturing, chemical processing or pharmaceutical uses and, in

addition, there are firms who could use FMEF to support the nuclear industry," he said. *that's me!*

"But inquiries have also come to us from industries we never examined," he explained. Although Minette declined to be more specific, he said one such inquiry has come from the "entertainment industry," which is looking for a permanent facility for a sound stage.

And, that's not as far-fetched as it may sound. A reactor in South Carolina is now being used as a movie studio.

Also, there has been interest from the "gemstone industry."

"I'm not sure who the final user will be, but it looks like we have a wide variety of choices," Minette added. "The purpose here is to find out what opportunities are out there and how we can use this building as an asset for the government, DOE and this community," he said.

FMEF won't come close to selling

for the \$200 million it cost.

The sale price will "depend in part on what someone wants to do with the building, with how much it impacts the site, what sort of special things we'd have to do and how many jobs it would bring," Minette added.

The sale or lease won't happen overnight. From nine months to two years is the estimate.

Is it realistic any private firm would be willing to buy or lease FMEF?

Minette and the marketing and management team of Gary Miller and Jim Steffen think so. Legislation passed last year gives DOE authority to transfer, sell or lease assets to commercial firms.

"We believe in miracles ... we can make this happen," Miller said.

WORLD WAR II

FIFTY YEARS AGO TODAY

MAR. 20

1 • 9 • 4 • 5

Indian infantrymen overrun Fort Dufferin, finishing the capture of Mandalay after three weeks of savage fighting in the Burmese city. Red Army troops take Braundenberg in East Prussia, while to the west Soviet forces drive the Germans from Altdamm, their last stronghold on the east side of the Oder River. U.S. soldiers take Saarbrücken and Zweibrücken in western Germany.



Source: "2194 Days of War," W. H. Smith Publishers Inc.; "World Almanac Book of World War II," Bison Books Corp., 1981

It's Your Call

Sunday's question:

Is *Schindler's List* too graphic to be shown in high school?

Readers' responses:

Yes 14
No 105

Today's question:

Should weight lifting be banned in prisons? Story, Page A1.

It's Your Call is a feature that gauges readers' responses to topical questions.

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