University of Arizona’s all-new Research Data Center is officially open for business. With a snip of the ceremonial ribbon, Senior Vice President for Research Leslie Tolbert and Chief Information Officer Michele Norin commemorated the occasion culminating a day of celebration and anticipation.

UA’s Research Computing Data Center, or RDC, is in the heart of UA’s Computer Center building. It is the high-tech home to five centrally-funded research computers now available to researchers, faculty and students all at no charge. After nearly two years of planning, construction and installation, the facility was opened with the fanfare of an exclusive “sneak peek” attended by campus leadership including President Eugene Sander and Provost Jacqueline Mok. Later, researchers and campus leaders attended a Grand Opening Luncheon with speakers including President Sander, Leslie Tolbert, Michele Norin, Susan Miller and keynote address by Dr. Joaquin Ruiz, Executive Dean, Colleges of Arts, Letters and Science.

The RDC is an exciting advancement that allows the University to maintain a competitive edge in the researching world and to make groundbreaking discoveries. “The data researchers can generate in a day in 2012 was unimaginable just a decade ago. Now the problem is how to analyze those data to make the most of the information they contain,” says Tolbert. Continued page 2
Just how challenging is that analysis? Susan Miller, Manager of Scientific Data Analysis for the Arizona Research Labs Biotechnology Computing Facility group, uses the HPC (High Performance Computing) systems for her data analysis. "If you can imagine a 400-million piece jigsaw puzzle and try to assemble it. But many of the pieces are identical on two or three sides, so it makes it really difficult to tell where they actually go. Machines like these allow us to put these enormous puzzles together".

And those puzzles can be nearly incomprehensible with some data points routinely numbering into the billions or even quadrillions. The power of the new research computers can now deliver results in hours or days rather than weeks or months.

“They can get to their findings faster,” says Michele Norin. “It creates a quicker timeline to push those concepts out to the community, the state, even the nation.”

The Grand Opening events concluded with an open house featuring guided tours for visitors through the usually locked-down, secure facility. Leading the tours was Adam Michel, UITS Systems Administrator, Principal. “I like educating people on the magic behind the curtain. News hits us all the time about cures for diseases, development of new materials and discoveries in physics and astronomy that fundamentally alter the human condition but very rarely is there any mention of the facilities and equipment required to produce those advances,” says Adam.

The grand opening events raised the visibility of Research Computing on campus as investigators in an increasing number of disciplines consider its use. “We have had interest and discussions with researchers who have not previously used UA HPC systems,” says Dr. Michael Bruck, Assistant Director of Research Computing.

Much more information including examples of some of the research projects conducted through the RDC is available on the Research Computing website, rc.arizona.edu. A visit to the site can be the first step to becoming a member of UA’s Research Computing community of users.

UA Provost Jacqueline Mok and President Gene Sander (l-r) tour the new Research Data Center during the Sneak Peek event as UITS’ Adam Michel demonstrates the facility’s chilled water cooling system.
The new Research Data Center is on the first floor of the Computer Center Building.

**Sponsors Fund Grand Opening Events**

All expenses of the Research Data Center Grand Opening events were fully funded by generous donations by event sponsors.

We thank our Platinum Sponsors: Data Direct Networks, World Wide Technologies, Inc. and EMC.

Also supporting the events were our Bronze sponsors: Altair, Condor Storage, Inc., Qualstar and SGI.

Through the sponsors’ support, the events allowed the Research Computing staff to meet new researchers, faculty and students who may consider using the new systems.

The UA Research Data Center Grand Opening reception was held in the hallways surrounding the facility.
Working behind the scenes at the 24/7 keeps an IT Manager busy! Robbie MacPherson has been in the manager position for a little over six months since receiving a promotion. Her biggest responsibility is ensuring she supports her full-time staff of seven (7) and helping to train new staff members and phone technicians at the 24/7. Her typical day starts with checking to see if any problems arose overnight and working to resolve any issues still outstanding. If the 24/7 receives a high call volume, she is known to join the phone bank to help clients.

Although Robbie oversees seven staff members, she doesn’t directly oversee students. For anyone interested in working at 24/7, Robbie looks for people who are willing to take initiative, who are eager to learn, and who have great customer service skills. Plus, she says having a sense of humor helps too.

Robbie says her biggest accomplishment has been her promotion into this new position. When she first arrived to the UA, she was hired as a liaison between the 24/7 and the Mosaic project. That position evolved into an accounts position, and next she was promoted to IT manager. Having worked in IT for over 30 years, this was a natural progression. Her humble beginnings began with helping her office mates with computer issues, then moving on with several different roles, including web developer, service systems administrator, and desktop support. She’s even worked at two out of the three state universities in Arizona: The UA, and Northern Arizona University (NAU).

What does Robbie enjoy most about working at the 24/7? She says every day is new and different. She comes in not knowing what she will face and the unpredictability is exciting. Robbie says the 24/7 is the best place to watch people work collaboratively. It’s a level playing field, because everyone here has each other’s back and everyone shares their knowledge. As for the most difficult IT problem Robbie has come across since being at the 24/7, she says it is hard to choose. Generally, the hardest ones involve areas the technical support staff do not control.

Outside of the 24/7, Robbie stays busy with her 16-year old daughter, Linden. Robbie attends Linden’s cheer competitions and encourages her at the games where she cheerleads. Robbie also loves to paint and attend church. One website she browses regularly is www.onesaleaday.com. The site is full of discounted electronics! Robbie doesn’t have a favorite movie, but she loves the Sci-Fi genre. She prefers a PC over a Mac but loves the new Apple iPad because it’s a new technology and fun to use.

Robbie invites her UITS co-workers to drop by the 24/7 with IT questions or just to say “hello”. Or e-mail her at robbiem@email.arizona.edu.