



UVM unveils high-speed computing center

How high is high? 7.1 teraflops — trillions per second

BY TIM JOHNSON, FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • SEPTEMBER 15, 2008

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SOUTH BURLINGTON — It was something of a coming-out party, except there were no refreshments, and the center of attention was mute.

The center of attention was the Vermont Advanced Computer Center, a high-performance [computing](#) cluster that the University of Vermont and its congressional patron, Sen. Patrick Leahy (D., Vermont) unveiled Monday morning as one of the fastest in New England.

Located in an off-campus technology park, the center has been operating more than two years — funded largely by a \$2.5 million appropriation garnered by Leahy — but only recently has its capacity been upgraded to a point deemed worthy of celebration. Leahy also has come up with an additional \$1.7 million to increase the capacity and the staff support even more.

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Leahy and assorted UVM luminaries showed up to tout the center's power and its potential value to researchers across the state.

How fast is this computing system? Its 1,400 processors can calculate in one day what it would take a standard desktop [computer](#) four years, according to a UVM "fact sheet." Its speed is gauged at 7.1 teraflops — that is, in effect, 7.1 trillion calculations per second. Work done by the primary five faculty users over the last eight months would have taken 128 years on a desktop, according to UVM.

How much storage space does it have? Enough to contain five times what's contained in all the

printed works in the Library of [Congress](#).

When UVM's leaders talk about making their institution "one of the premier small research universities" — a frequently cited goal that was invoked again Monday — they see the Vermont Advanced Computing Center as a key ingredient.

The center is an important draw for the top-flight faculty UVM seeks to attract, said Domenico Grasso, dean of the College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences. Researchers in his wing make ample use of the center — researchers like Chris Danforth, an assistant professor of mathematics and statistics with a grounding in chaos theory.

Danforth, introduced by Grasso as a "rising star," said the high-speed computing capability was one of the reasons he came to UVM to begin with. The center allows him to crunch millions of numbers in research that ranges from climate prediction to "the emotional state of the blogosphere."

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Grasso recalled that just a few years ago, "our faculty members were laboring with inadequate computing capacity."

The center, which can be accessed from office desktops, will help "create a culture of [innovation](#) that will enable us to hire the best faculty members in the world," he said.

Leahy said his commitment to the computing center goes back five years and won't end with the second appropriation.

"I'm in it for the long haul," he said.

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