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Sir Richard Branson and New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez dedicate the 'Virgin Galactic Gateway to Space' as WhiteKnightTwo and SpaceShipTwo soar over Spaceport America

New Science and Education Customers to Bring Benefits of Space Access to Students and Researchers

LAS CRUCES, N.M. — Looking skyward, more than 800 guests marveled at [Virgin Galactic's](#) commercial space vehicles as they soared through the skies of southern New Mexico during the dedication ceremonies of Virgin Galactic's new home at [Spaceport America](#). The flight of [WhiteKnightTwo](#) and [SpaceShipTwo](#) was the highlight of a spectacular ceremony which featured the dedication of the Sir Norman Foster-designed building and announcements of new scientific and educational customers for the world's first commercial space line.

"Today is another history-making day for Virgin Galactic," said Sir Richard Branson. "We are here with a group of incredible people who are helping us lead the way in creating one of the most important new industrial sectors of the 21st century. We've never wavered in our commitment to the monumental task of pioneering safe, affordable and clean access to space, or to demonstrate that we mean business at each step along the way."

Branson and his children, Sam and Holly, who will be the first commercial passengers on SpaceShipTwo, brought the event to a spectacular conclusion by officially naming the world's first purpose-built spaceline terminal as the "Virgin Galactic Gateway to Space" while rappelling together from the roof of the striking new building.

"I trust that will be the first of many safe landings at Spaceport America! What an absolute joy to celebrate the naming of the Virgin Galactic Gateway to Space with Governor Martinez!" said Sir Richard, as the family touched the ground.

The Virgin Galactic Gateway to Space, a combined terminal and hangar facility, will support up to two WhiteKnightTwo and five SpaceShipTwo vehicles. In addition, The Gateway will house all of the company's astronaut preparation and celebration facilities, a mission control center, and a friends and family area. There is also space committed to public access via the planned New Mexico Spaceport Authority's Visitor Experience.

The iconic 120,000 square-foot building, which meets [LEED Gold standards](#) for environmental quality, was designed by world-renowned United Kingdom-based [Foster + Partners](#), along with [URS Corporation](#) and local New Mexico architects [SMPC](#). The trio won an international competition in 2007 to build the first private spaceport in the world.

Built using local materials and regional construction techniques, the facility is sustainable with few additional energy requirements due to the use of a range of sustainable features including geothermal heating and cooling.



[New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez](#) participated in the dedication ceremony with [U.S. Congressman Steve Pearce](#), representing New Mexico's 2nd District.

"New Mexico has a long tradition of pioneering innovation in aerospace and related technologies," said Governor Martinez. "We already possess an impressive array of facilities and expertise in advanced technologies. Spaceport America and the opening of the Virgin Galactic Gateway to Space significantly deepen those capabilities and strengthen our global position as a powerhouse supporter of the space industry. Our partnership with Virgin Galactic is a perfect example of how government and private industry can work together to drive economic growth and science education."

Virgin Galactic CEO and President George Whitesides said the company continues to make excellent and unequalled progress, under the motto 'safety is our North Star.' Whitesides remarked, "Flight testing by prime contractor Scaled Composites is progressing very well, with 30 SpaceShipTwo flights and 75 WhiteKnightTwo flights to date. We are also recruiting aggressively and assembling a highly talented and accomplished workforce focused on safe commercial operations led by [Vice President of Operations Mike Moses](#), who will run our efforts at the spaceport."

In addition, the company is taking steps to expand its mission beyond commercial space tourism. The company announced last week that it had been [awarded a contract under NASA's Flight Opportunity Program](#) for research flights to a potential value of \$4.5m. During the ceremony, it was announced that new flight reservations have been made by research and education institutions to support research initiatives and inspire students. Purdue University, Space Florida, the Challenger Center for Space Science Education and Southwest Research Institute were recognized as the most recent participants in this new growth area for Virgin Galactic.

"For me, my children and our ever growing community of future astronauts, many of whom are with us today, standing in front of the Virgin Galactic Gateway to Space as it glimmers majestically under the New Mexican sun brings our space adventure so close we can almost taste it," said Sir Richard.

Present for the dedication ceremony were over 150 Virgin Galactic customers from 21 countries who have already made deposits to fly to space. A total of over 450 future astronauts worldwide have signed on to join Virgin Galactic for a voyage into space.

For photos, video footage and a complete electronic press kit from today's event, [click here](#).

[About Virgin Galactic](#)

Virgin Galactic, owned by Sir Richard Branson's [Virgin Group](#) and [Aabar Investments PJS](#), is on track to be the world's first commercial spaceline. The new spaceship (SpaceshipTwo, VSS *Enterprise*) and carrier craft (WhiteKnightTwo, VMS *Eve*) have both been developed for Virgin Galactic by Mojave-based [Scaled Composites](#). Founded by Burt Rutan, Scaled developed SpaceShipOne, which in 2004 claimed the \$10m Ansari X Prize as the world's first privately developed manned spacecraft. Virgin Galactic's new vehicles share much of the same basic



design, but are being built to carry six customers, or the equivalent scientific research payload, on sub-orbital space flights, allowing an out-of-the-seat, zero-gravity experience and offering astounding views of the planet from the black sky of space for tourist astronauts and a unique microgravity platform for researchers. The *VSS Enterprise* and *VMS Eve* test flight program is well under way, leading to Virgin Galactic commercial operations, which will be based at Spaceport America in New Mexico.

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