Kevin Costner, an electrical engineer at Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, cuts the ribbon to the new Innovation LaunchPad at China Lake on June 12. Costner is flanked by Richard Chairez, left, NAWCWD innovation lead, a large team of supporters and NAWCWD leaders, from left, Rear Adm. Scott Dillon, NAWCWD commander, Joan Johnson, NAWCWD executive director, and Dan Carreño, director of the Weapons and Energetics Department. (U.S. Navy photo)

NAV AIR WARFARE CENTER WEAPONS DIVISION, POINT MUGU, Calif. - Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division opened two “Innovation LaunchPads” with ribbon-cutting ceremonies June 8 and 12 in Point Mugu and China Lake, California.

Innovation LaunchPads are makerspaces where employees can gather to foster creativity, critical thinking, and innovative collaboration across codes.

“The maker movement is all about bringing together a community of technical and creative people who help one another do better,” said Richard Chairez, NAWCWD’s innovation lead. “The Innovation LaunchPads give our workforce a place to do just that.”

The idea for the LaunchPads was born nearly two years ago, when a handful of employees in the Engineer and Scientist Development Program approached Dr. Ron Smiley, national director of E*Warfare, Sensors and Avionics, and Tom Dowd, NAVAIR Ranges director, with an idea for a collaboration space for NAWCWD employees to generate new ideas and
problem-solve for the fleet.

“Our response was ‘let’s go do it,’” Smiley said. “After they left, we looked at each other and asked ‘How are we going to make this happen?’”

After pulling together resources from their departments and getting some things cobbled together for the space, the two realized it was time to approach the rest of the executive leadership team.

“At the rate we were going, it would have been 10 years before anything was real. With command funding and some visionary and energetic ESDPs, we got it done in two,” Smiley said.

The two locations are similarly appointed with equipment and workstations to help users get their creative juices flowing, and Chairez envisions hosting workshops, topic-centered brainstorming sessions, and brown bag sessions on site. The idea, he said, is to get people exploring new ideas and finding those that might be the next big leap for the fleet.

In addition to existing collaboration opportunities and online tools like the Fusion suite, Chairez believes the Innovation LaunchPads can help NAWCWD’s innovative culture thrive.

“Innovation is a mindset and a responsibility,” he said. “We are all responsible for making NAWCWD more efficient and effective at meeting the warfighter’s needs. Innovation LaunchPads are one more tool to help us meet that challenge.”

Rear Admiral Scott Dillon, NAWCWD commander, believes innovative thinking is an attribute that thrives at NAWCWD, which facilities like the Innovation LaunchPads can foster and support.

“NAWCWD really is known throughout the Navy for being a center of innovation and what other warfare centers should look to as an example. We’re known for being critical thinkers, in that we don’t take no for an answer,” Dillon said.

“In my mind, the real power of this sort of a facility is that it brings people together who can collaborate with one another and who can ask themselves, ‘Why is the conventional wisdom that this idea will not work? What is it that people think is going to stop us?’ We work together and we talk about ways around those barriers and, with talented and intelligent people gathered together in a facility like this, we will knock down barriers that the outside world believes exists.”
Makerspaces launch innovation at NAWCWD

David Mohler demonstrates virtual and augmented reality technology during the Point Mugu Innovation LaunchPad ribbon cutting and open house June 8. (U.S. Navy photo)