Forensics center opens at UCO

University of Central Oklahoma President Roger Webb speaks Thursday at the opening of the Forensic Science Institute on the Edmond campus.
EDMOND — The unique dome at the entrance of the University of Central Oklahoma campus stood high in the blue Edmond skies Thursday as people inside celebrated the opening of the Forensic Science Institute.

More than 200 undergraduate students and about 40 graduate students started classes Jan. 11 in the $12 million building.

An official opening of the institute Thursday brought more than 100 people who director Dwight Adams called friends and associates. Law enforcement officials and criminal investigators from the federal to the state level joined area legislators and city officials at the gathering.

“Our degree program here at UCO is both unique and innovative,” Adams told the group. “This program is not found anywhere else in the country. We owe a lot of thanks to those friends and associates.”

This is the second link in building a hub for the forensic science community in Edmond. The Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation Forensic Science Center that opened in May 2008 is across the street from the institute. There is now a push by Edmond city officials to move the state medical examiner’s office from Oklahoma City to Edmond.

Several mentions of the medical examiner coming to Edmond — a desired third link in the forensic science niche — brought cheers and clapping from those at the opening.

Adams, the former director of the FBI Laboratory in Quantico, Va., returned to the Edmond campus 3½ years ago with a mission to create an institute where students are educated and professionals continue their training. Adams is a UCO graduate.

Roger Webb, UCO president, said, “To some this was ambitious and not in keeping with reality. Why not Oklahoma?”

“What the students are learning here is to learn the truth so the scales of justice can be balanced. We have no idea where science and technology will take us in the future.

“We do know that the criminals and terrorists will be here. That is why a program like this is important,” Webb said.

The institute has a 165-seat auditorium, four classrooms, conference room, faculty offices and a multipurpose evidence recovery bay.

The new building incorporates the latest in computer equipment, especially in the AT&T Digital Evidence and Cyber Security Laboratory, which was made possible through a $1 million grant from the AT&T Foundation.

Law enforcement officers from OSBI and Oklahoma City and Edmond police departments work in the AT&T lab that is fully operational now, Adams said. The officers are working actual cases from Oklahoma, Arkansas, New Mexico and other surrounding states.