

How Nuclear Science Week helped Oak Ridge firms and future workers

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of February 2, 2026)

Matt Mullins, Marketing and Communications Manager for the American Museum of Science and Energy Foundation, led the effort to bring Nuclear Science Week to Oak Ridge in October 2025. The week included a wide variety of activities, including tours, presentations, exhibits, and panel discussions. The focus was on the nuclear renaissance happening in Oak Ridge. This introductory column is intended to set the stage for a five-column series, written by Carolyn Krause, on the "Dirt Tour" featuring many of the new companies coming to Oak Ridge as a part of the state's effort to make Oak Ridge the epicenter for Nuclear Energy expansion in the nation.

Last year was an appropriate one for the American Museum of Science and Energy (AMSE) of Oak Ridge to host the national Nuclear Science Week (NSW) in the third week of October, starting on Oct. 20, 2025. This annual, international, broadly observed, week-long celebration focuses local, regional, national, and international interest on all aspects of nuclear science. Oak Ridge is becoming a nuclear energy hub that is winning national attention. Some people even call the city the "core of Tennessee's nuclear renaissance." Here's why.

Four nuclear firms announced in 2025 their intentions to buy land or establish nuclear facilities – from nuclear reactors to makers of reactor fuel – in East Tennessee Technology Park in Oak Ridge. Between 2021 and 2024, three nuclear companies had purchased tracts in ETTP, which is near the decades-old site on which the Tennessee Valley Authority plans to build its first of possibly four small modular nuclear reactors.

NSW enables attendees to learn about the contributions and innovations of nuclear scientists and engineers, as well as about the opportunities available to explore nuclear science and get jobs in the field.

During the week, educators, students, employers and the community participate in a national recognition of how nuclear science plays a vital role in the lives of Americans – and the world. Activities during the week are intended to build awareness of the contributions of the nuclear science industry and those who work in it every day.

Many local events take place all over the nation during Nuclear Science Week. It is celebrated in cities big and small, and any community is invited to get involved and host a Nuclear Science Week celebration. Each year, a different city is chosen to host the national celebration, and 2025 was the year for the Oak Ridge science museum.

The NSW is an international event, but the American museum that was founded and leads the coordination of the U.S. version of the event is the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History (NMNSH) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. A Smithsonian Affiliate like AMSE, the museum consulted with industry partners in 2009 to create the week, and it serves as the official, congressionally chartered resource for nuclear history and science.

Oak Ridge was chosen for 2025 because of a successful proposal submitted in 2024 to the NSW committee by Alan Lowe, executive director of AMSE, and the Atomic History Campus at K-25, and Matt Mullins, director of marketing and communications for the AMSE Foundation. They had been aware of NSW for several years, had visited other museums hosting the main NSW event and had participated in holding events during the NSW at AMSE and other museums they visited.

"In 2023, Matt Mullins and I attended the NSW events in the host city of San Diego and began discussions then about Oak Ridge hosting NSW in the future," Lowe said. "In 2024, AMSE worked with various partners in the city to host larger events and educational activities around NSW. We hosted a three-part movie series discussing nuclear misinformation that culminated in a Godzilla double-feature."

How Nuclear Science Week helped Oak Ridge firms and future workers

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of February 2, 2026)

"While visiting Idaho National Laboratory, the NSW host site in 2024, Jennifer Hayden, the NMNSH president, whom I had spoken with several times, suggested we submit a proposal." Mullins said. "The proposal AMSE submitted was based on four key ideas: Oak Ridge's workforce, educational opportunities, amazing history, and future for nuclear development.

"We made the case that Oak Ridge has a tremendous network of people already doing amazing work preparing to build advanced reactors and manufacture new reactor fuels to help meet anticipated increases in demand for electricity. We asserted that making AMSE the host for the 2025 NSW provided an excellent opportunity to showcase the existing efforts in Oak Ridge to move the nation into a new nuclear era – what is called the nuclear renaissance."

Before submitting the proposal, Mullins sought advice, guidance, and support from local organizations. From the beginning, he said, the East Tennessee Economic Council and the Oak Ridge Chamber of Commerce provided whatever assistance was needed. Word about the event was spread by local organizations affiliated with the American Nuclear Society, U.S. Women in Nuclear and universities such as MIT and Penn State.

These and other partners, along with AMSE, invited numerous companies in Oak Ridge and Knoxville, as well as Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the Y-12 National Security Complex, to showcase their nuclear projects. One such company based at ORNL is making nuclear medicine from nuclear waste. These companies conveyed information on their accomplishments and plans through talks, PowerPoint presentations, and posters.

Another effective way was the New Nuclear "Dirt Tour" luxury bus tour on Tuesday, Oct. 21, 2025, featuring stops at 11 sites (including a new museum for lunch). The bus passengers were treated to talks by representatives of the companies and a chance to ask questions and take photos of buildings and bobcats – compact tractors, not animals – on the sites.

Carolyn Krause, volunteer journalist for The Oak Ridger, took the tour and wrote a series of five articles for the newspaper's Historically Speaking column on the plans of eight companies and the Tennessee Valley Authority, the nation's largest public utility. Her first article appears next week.

In one event at the Oak Ridge Playhouse, speakers gave histories of Oak Ridge, TVA, and the U.S. nuclear industry's response to and recovery from the accident at one nuclear power plant at Three Mile Island in 1979. That same event included a live taping of the AMSE Foundation's podcast, AMSEcast, with writer Michelle Shocklee about her novel, The Women of Oak Ridge.

One of the major successes of the Nuclear Science Week in Oak Ridge was matching companies with people in or close to entering the workforce who have the appropriate skills and academic or vocational interests.

According to Mullins, "Our partners and I asked company representatives to show up to the event ready to talk about hiring opportunities on Tuesday, tell students of all ages what education they need to work for nuclear companies on Wednesday and meet with the public individually and give public talks on Friday at the Nuclear Tech Expo.

"People were showing up with resumes and wearing suits, ready to get a job. We had well over 30 companies represented at the main campus of Roane State Community College in Oak Ridge. The interactions visitors had with those companies were exceptional.

"As I walked through the booths and spoke with each of the representatives of the companies that were participating, they were shuffling through resumes and making positive notes, and each of them had a positive experience with potential workers."

How Nuclear Science Week helped Oak Ridge firms and future workers

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of February 2, 2026)

"It is fantastic to have multi-national, multi-million, and billion-dollar companies seeking out opportunities to engage with folks in our local communities and workforce."

Mullins captured the talks during the weeklong event in audio and video recordings that will be released to the public.

"Oak Ridge is the center of the nuclear universe, so we were very proud to host Nuclear Science Week," Lowe said. "Our team, including our terrific Matt Mullins, who was an unstoppable force on this initiative, worked very hard with so many partners to create an amazing array of activities for people of all ages.

"We are deeply grateful for being chosen by our colleagues in New Mexico to be the NSW host, and to everyone in Oak Ridge and beyond who made the week such a resounding success. "AMSE is committed to initiating, supporting, and promoting interactions between million-dollar and billion-dollar companies in our local thriving nuclear ecosystem, who are eager to engage with our regional partners and evolving workforce.

"Nuclear Science Week has been a great way to let a national audience know about the growing nuclear energy hub in Oak Ridge. Truly, every week is Nuclear Science Week at AMSE!"

Please be on the lookout for the upcoming series of Historically Speaking columns featuring the "Dirt Tour" of Nuclear Science Week.



How Nuclear Science Week helped Oak Ridge firms and future workers

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of February 2, 2026)

Jennifer Hayden, President and CEO of the National Museum of Nuclear History and Science, founding organization for Nuclear Science Week, speaks to the large Nuclear Science Week crowd at the William J. Wilcox, Jr. K-25 Interpretive Center



Alan Lowe welcomes the Nuclear Science Week participants, getting the week's events off to a rousing good start

How Nuclear Science Week helped Oak Ridge firms and future workers

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of February 2, 2026)



Sponsors of Nuclear Science Week

How Nuclear Science Week helped Oak Ridge firms and future workers

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of February 2, 2026)

NSW NUCLEAR SCIENCE WEEK

WEEK AT A GLANCE

Monday | Opening Reception - Presented by Orano USA

- 4:30pm - 7:30pm: Welcome reception at the Bill Wilcox | K-25 Interpretative Center.

Tuesday | Workforce Development Day & Career Fair - Presented by Kairos Power

- 8:30am - 1:00pm: New Nuclear "Dirt Tour" of Oak Ridge
- 3:00pm - 5:00pm - Oak Ridge CTE, Machining and Manufacturing, iSchool Tour at Oak Ridge High School
- 5:00pm - 7:30pm: Nuclear Science Week Career Fair at Roane State

Wednesday | K-12 Education Day: Nuclear Student Expo - Presented by Y-12

- 8:00am - 7:30pm: Atomic Education Summit hosted at the Oak Ridge Conference Center
- 1:00pm - 1:30pm: Splitting the Atom - Manhattan Project National Historical Park at A.K. Bissell Park

Thursday | Throwback Thursday - Presented by ORNL Federal Credit Union

- 8:30am - 12:30pm: Historic DOE Bus Tour
- 1:30pm - 5:00pm: 80 years of Atomic Innovation at the Oak Ridge Playhouse
- 6:00pm - 7:00pm: Building America's Secret City: Guided Ranger Walk in Jackson Square
- 7:00pm - 8:00pm: Tennis Court Dance hosted by the National Park Service at Jackson Square Tennis Courts

Friday - NSW Expo & Closing Celebration

- 7:30am - 9:00am: East Tennessee Economic Council special meeting for Nuclear Science Week at Pollard Auditorium.
- 4:30pm - 7:30pm: Atomic Future Expo at the American Museum of Science and Energy

Scan the QR Code for More!



Nuclear Science Week events