

By Art Raymond

Concrete, ND - The first shovel of dirt was turned Monday and work started immediately on construction of the \$137 million Safeguard ABM site in northeastern North Dakota.

Mayors of five Safeguard area towns joined with representatives of the construction contractor, Morrison-Knudsen, and with the US Army Corps of Engineers in the groundbreaking ceremonies here Monday morning.

William Gilfillan, project manager for M-K, said his firm and those in partnership in the combine on the contract, are busily assembling machinery and equipment. Actual work begins immediately and gradually increases tempo as more and more machinery and equipment is brought to the construction areas.

The formal groundbreaking ceremonies were held at the site where a Perimeter Acquisition Radar (PAR) will be built. However, work begins immediately, too, on a Missile Site Radar (MSR) south of Langdon, ND, near Nekoma.

These two projects will be carried on simultaneously.

Joining in groundbreaking ceremonies were the following mayors: Bill Verwey, Nekoma; Harold Blanchard, Langdon; Bob Olson, Cavalier; Arnold Christianson, Mountain, and John Karel, Walhalla. Joining with them were Gilfillan; Lt. Col. Vern Davis, assistant area engineer for the US Army Corps of Engineers, and State Sen. Richard Forkner, R-Langdon.

Gilfillan announced that A.D. "Doc" Poteat is superintendent in charge of construction. He joined in groundbreaking ceremonies.

A group of 11 demonstrators, 12 if one counts a baby carried by one girl, were led by Fr. Branconnier.

They made no speeches but held their own groundbreaking. Their one placard said, "Groundbreaking for Life. Plant Durum." They symbolically carried out their own directive by each sprinkling a few grains of durum in the earth their shovels had opened.

Somewhere around 200 persons joined in observing the groundbreaking for the ABM defensive weapons system authorized by Congress.

The construction of the "Grand Forks Site," as it is officially labelled, marks the first start of the ABM Safeguard System. Another, at Malmstrom AFB, has been authorized but contracts have not been let on that project.

President Nixon has asked Congress for authorization for Phase II ABM construction. This proposal seeks construction of another ABM site in Missouri.

Morrison-Knudsen formed a combine with several other giant contractors and won the low bid for the ABM job in North Dakota. M-K has established its temporary headquarters in Grand Forks but will move to the construction area as soon as facilities are completed there.

The US Army Corps of Engineers is maintaining its temporary headquarters in Langdon but also will move to the construction area when its office headquarters is complete.