

[Bon voyage party for Bertha draws 5,000 to SR 99 tunnel site](#)

Local News

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SEATTLE – Start with some sun, soil and celebration. Then add [Bertha](#), the massive machine that will dig the SR 99 tunnel beneath downtown Seattle, and 5,000 of her closest friends. The result is a party big enough for the biggest tunnel-builder the world has ever seen.

Thousands of people descended on the SR 99 tunnel launch pit on Saturday for a chance to see [Bertha up-close](#) before she starts tunneling later this month. Guests talked to project staff, learned about the project and walked around the construction site, including one of the walkways that spans the 80-foot-deep pit where Bertha will soon start tunneling.

“This is a historic day,” Gov. Inslee told guests, before participating in a short ceremony to christen the machine. “When I look down into this pit, I don’t just see a big machine. I see determination, I see innovation, I see teamwork, I see a symbol of a community that worked together to move us forward.”

The event included activities designed to teach kids about science and engineering. Guests also had the opportunity to [sign their name](#) on one of the concrete segments that will form the tunnel’s walls.

Bertha, who has been updating her progress on Twitter since December, said she was surprised to see so many people show up to wish her well. “Really humbled by the turnout at my party today,” [@BerthaDigsSR99](#) tweeted Saturday. “Don’t worry, I’m not going to get all weepy. Just know I’m grateful… and ready to dig.”

Tunneling will start after final testing is complete, likely by the end of July. The tunnel is scheduled to open to drivers in late 2015. For more information about the SR 99 Tunnel Project, visit <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/Viaduct/>.