

ABCCM plans new facility in Candler

By Julie Ball

October 26, 2013

CANDLER — Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministry is planning a building to house its Hominy Valley crisis ministry along with a primary care practice.

"It will really be a community service center," said the Rev. Scott Rogers, ABCCM executive director.

A groundbreaking for the 9,600-square-foot building is slated for 4 p.m. Friday.

The building, which will be on U.S. 19-23, will be called the Ferguson Charitable Center. It is a partnership with Mountain Area Health Education Center and will house the MAHEC Family Health Care Center Enka/Candler. Dr. Eric Smith will provide primary care to patients on a sliding scale.

The facility will also provide more space for ABCCM's Hominy Valley Crisis Ministry, now in a 1,600-square-foot house. The current location has limited storage room and stairs that make it a challenge for volunteers. The new building will include classrooms.

Rogers said a group of ministers in the area came to him about two years ago and said, "We've decided we need a bigger facility."

At the same time, Jack Ferguson had been talking to Rogers for years about creating a clinic in that area for low-income families.

"Every year since 2000, Jack has called me up and said 'Do we have a clinic yet? Do we have a doctor?'" Rogers said. "As we talked about this whole idea, one of the things I did was talk to Dr. Jeff Heck at MAHEC and told him about this dream and vision that we had."

Heck, MAHEC president and CEO, responded that he had "a young doctor who is really committed to this kind of medical work," according to Rogers. Smith, who completed his MAHEC residency last year, said when he began thinking about what he wanted to do, he decided he "wanted to do medicine in the ministry field."

"As a Christian, both my wife and I want to do something. We've even been considering doing short stints overseas," he said. "It just seemed like this was my calling and what I had been raised up to do."

ABCCM will provide the space to MAHEC at no cost.

"The clinic is geared to those who are under-insured or uninsured," Smith said.

However, it's not a free clinic like the ABCCM clinic in Asheville. Smith expects the bulk of his patients to be covered by either Medicaid or Medicare.

"This is kind of an experimental model," he said "It will be a work in progress."

The project came together with the help of individuals and Candler churches, Rogers said.



Eric Smith, MD

Jack and Carolyn Ferguson have committed \$1 million for the \$1.4 million project, Rogers said.

Another couple donated two acres on U.S. 19-23 for the building.

"There are very few medical practices out in this area. A lot of the folks have to go all the way into Asheville. That can be a real challenge for folks who, even if they have a car and it's running, the gas to go in (to Asheville) and back can be a challenge," said Jay Bissett, who serves as pastor of both Sardis United Methodist and Reeves Chapel United Methodist churches.

Joe Tarpley, pastor at Oak Hill United Methodist Church, said the new facility should make health care more accessible in the Candler area.

"It may be kind of a bridge for the whole community," Tarpley said.

The facility will provide help to those in need, and at the same time "it will give other people in the community a way to help," Tarpley said.