

PHYSICIAN GIVING \$1 MILLION TO ASHEVILLE MEDICAL CAMPUS

JULIE BALL, *The Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 31, 2015



ASHEVILLE – A retired anesthesiologist plans to give \$1 million to the UNC School of Medicine Asheville campus.

The planned estate gift by Dr. Frank Moretz is part of a larger, \$3 million gift that will be divided between the Asheville campus, the UNC Chapel Hill School of Anesthesiology and the Department of Psychology at UNC Chapel Hill. It is the first major gift to the Asheville campus, which opened in 2009.

“I was very grateful to the university for accepting me as a medical student years ago,” Moretz said. “The university took a chance on me, and I wanted to pay them back.”

Moretz, who grew up in Hickory, says during his time at Chapel Hill he was diagnosed with dyslexia. The university helped train him to overcome it, he said.

He was admitted to the UNC medical school and completed his residency in 1979. After spending a few years in Texas and Virginia, he came to Asheville, where he practiced for more than 30 years. He retired last fall.

Moretz is also a partner in Highland Brewing and former president of the WNC Medical Society.

The Fairview resident is a “triple Tar Heel,” having completed undergraduate, medical school and his residency through UNC Chapel Hill.

“The university is going through some difficult times now with cuts from the legislature and with the academic scandal, I thought this would be a good time to publicly support the university,” Moretz said.

The UNC medical school's Asheville campus opened with four students. It now has 20 third-year medical students and slots for up to 20 fourth-year students.

The campus is a collaboration with the Mountain Area Health Education Center, which has residency programs in family medicine and obstetrics, and with Mission Health.

One goal of the program is to produce more doctors who stay in Western North Carolina. It also emphasizes primary care and rural medicine, which are both in demand.

“When I was in Chapel Hill, my best rotations were outside of Chapel Hill,” Moretz said.

“I just find that medical students get a better experience outside the ivory tower working with private practice physicians. It's like an apprenticeship. It's much smaller groups. You learn one-on-one. You learn faster,” he said. “I want to support students coming out here. Plus I know how important rural medicine is and exposing the medical students to rural medicine.”

Students on the Asheville campus work with local practices as well as with MAHEC physicians and doctors at Mission.

Unlike the traditional approach to medical education, the Asheville campus uses “longitudinal curriculum,” according to Dr. Robyn Latessa, director and assistant dean of the UNC School of Medicine Asheville.

“Usually in medical schools, students in their clinical year learn in blocks of rotations. So they do six weeks of OB, six weeks of surgery, and then they move on,” Latessa said.

The Asheville students, “they learn all of the specialties simultaneously here, and in a given week, they have a half day with all different specialties,” she said.

“It gives an opportunity for much more continuity of patients and continuity of mentorships,” Latessa said.

The approach helps build relationships and helps establish stronger connections to the community.

“Traditional medical education can cause students to lose their idealism and empathy. The connections and relationships that students develop with their patients and mentors over time are what keep or enhance their idealism and keep the heart of medicine alive,” Latessa said.

Latessa said Moretz is leaving it to the leadership of the Asheville campus to determine how best to use the money when it becomes available in the future, but he does want to see it support rural communities and rural needs.

“That's something that is a big mission of our program so it fits well,” she said.