



NEWS RELEASE

Media Contact: Jennifer Maurer
External Communications Manager
Jennifer.maurer@mahec.net
828-257-4445

New Dental and Primary Care Teaching Office Comes to Columbus, North Carolina

A Partnership with MAHEC, Isothermal Community College, and St. Luke's Hospital Supports New Dental Degree Program, Primary Care Training, and Patient Care

(Columbus, N.C. — Nov. 13, 2018) — On Monday, Nov. 26, at 6:00 p.m., Mountain Area Health Education Center, Isothermal, and St. Luke's Hospital will host a public signing event at the future home of the MAHEC Dental Health Center at Columbus and Foothills Medical Associates soon-to-be located at 130 Forest Glen Drive in Columbus, N.C. (see details below).

This event formalizes the partnership among these three entities to establish a dental and medical care teaching practice in Polk County that will support ICC's new dental assistant program and health sciences learners from across the state.

"There is a shortage of dental and primary healthcare providers across Western North Carolina," explains Jeff Heck, MD, chief executive officer of MAHEC.

"Too many families are using hospital emergency departments for their dental care, which is costly and does not improve oral health outcomes. We want to make dental and primary healthcare more accessible across our region. This new collaborative partnership will help us do that."

Thirteen of the 16 western counties MAHEC serves are federally designated [dental health professional shortage areas](#). In North Carolina, the number of [emergency department visits related to dental conditions](#) is twice the national average, and the rate is higher in rural areas. Poverty, transportation challenges, health literacy, and lack of diversity in the dental workforce are also barriers to good oral health here in WNC.

"Isothermal is excited to be a part of this partnership and to offer a dental assisting program that will provide a career path to a good job to many in a career that is in demand. It is an effort that will lead to economic growth and improve quality of life for our citizens," explains Walter Dalton, ICC's president.

"It would not be possible without this public-private partnership and the coordination of space, equipment and expertise. It is a partnership which addresses a need and does it in a cost-effective manner. We thank MAHEC and St. Luke's for the role each has played in the process and know that the door stands open for continued meaningful collaboration in the future."

The MAHEC Dental Health Center at Columbus will open in the spring of 2019 after renovations are completed to the former Hospice administrative building located behind St. Luke's Hospital. The comprehensive dental center will provide clinical training opportunities for ICC's new dental assistant program, which is expected to welcome its first class in the fall of 2019. The center will also train residents in MAHEC's dental residency program and students from the UNC School of Dentistry in

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Chapel Hill. Students in other health professions will work with primary care providers at Foothills Medical Associates which will be located in the same building.

"St. Luke's Hospital and our Foothills Medical Associates providers are pleased to partner with MAHEC and ICC in our effort to improve access to primary care in Columbus and the surrounding area we serve," shares David Pope, interim chief executive officer of St. Luke's Hospital.

"The importance of board and medical leadership, with a shared vision for providing essential health services through this partnership, cannot be overstated. We are grateful that providers and regional partners have come together to further enhance our goal to provide exceptional care close to home."

The practice will also host learners from the Asheville campuses of the UNC School of Medicine and UNC Eshelman School of Pharmacy as well as other health professions learners. By training learners in a rural area, MAHEC hopes to attract more healthcare providers to careers in rural healthcare.

For more information on the MAHEC Dental Health Center at Columbus, please contact Ed Coryell, DDS, at ed.coryell@mahec.net. For more information on Foothills Medical Associates, contact Jeffrey Viar, DO, at 828-894-5627. For more information about ICC's Dental Assistant Teaching Program, contact Dolly Horton at dhorton@isothermal.edu.

Public Signing Event Details

- Begins at 6 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 26, at the future home of MAHEC Dental Health Center at Columbus and Foothills Medical Associates
- 130 Forest Glen Drive in Columbus, NC 28722 (former Hospice of the Carolina Foothills building)
- Public signing will include a seated dinner (by invitation only please)
- RSVP requested by Nov. 12 via [online form](#) or by emailing michelle.morgan@mahec.net
- Media welcome

Media Contacts:

Jennifer Maurer, MAHEC, 828-257-4445 or jennifer.maurer@mahec.net

Michael Gavin, Isothermal Community College, 828-395-1295 or mgavin@isothermal.edu

Kathy Woodham, St. Luke's Hospital, 828-894-0972 or kathy.woodham@slhnc.org

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The Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC) was established in 1974 and is a leader in healthcare, education and innovation. Located in Asheville, MAHEC serves a 16-county region in Western North Carolina. It is the largest [Area Health Education Center](#) in North Carolina, which evolved to address national and state concerns with the supply, retention and quality of health professionals. MAHEC's mission is to train the next generation of healthcare professionals for Western North Carolina through quality healthcare, innovative education, and best practice models that can be replicated nationally. MAHEC's Biltmore campus is also home to [UNC Health Sciences at MAHEC](#), an academic health center in partnership with UNC-Chapel Hill that includes programs from the UNC School of Medicine, UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, and UNC Eshelman School of Pharmacy. For more information, visit www.mahec.net.

Isothermal Community College, a member of the North Carolina Community College System, is a comprehensive, two-year, public institution that serves the individuals in Rutherford and Polk counties. In addition to individual courses, the College offers approximately 90 certificate, diploma, and degree programs enabling students to either transfer to a four-year institution or acquire skills for new or current employment, as well as function effectively as responsible citizens. The College also provides training for area business and industry, personal enrichment courses, remedial and developmental courses, and community service activities. For more information, visit: www.isothermal.edu

St. Luke's Hospital is a private, not for profit, community hospital that provides immediate access to high quality emergency, acute medical /surgical and geriatric care. St. Luke's provides diagnostic and medical services using the latest technology and the greatest compassion for patients and families. Using the healthcare industry's best practices, St. Luke's Hospital is focused on patient safety, high quality care and excellent patient satisfaction, consistently meeting or beating national standards in place for hospitals across the country. Fully accredited by The Joint Commission, St. Luke's Hospital is also monitored by the Centers for Medicare/Medicaid Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and, most importantly, by our patients through a nationally standardized satisfaction survey. With an all-volunteer Board of Trustees who live in the Carolina Foothills, St. Luke's Hospital is dedicated to providing exceptional care close to home.

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