



FirstHealth of the Carolinas' four-story, \$60 million cancer center is set to break ground in early 2021 with an anticipated opening in November 2022. The new building, rendered above, will be a one-stop shop for cancer patients to get diagnoses, treatments and therapeutic support.

COMMUNITY CLOSE-UP: MOORE COUNTY

CANCER CARE'S ONE-STOP SHOP

A new, all-encompassing cancer center is coming to Moore County in just a few years.

When Pinehurst-based FirstHealth of the Carolinas opens its one-stop shop cancer center in 2022, the 15-county medical network will have a centralized diagnosis

and care center, a headquarters for its clinical trials and a check mark on the to-do list of priorities set by new CEO Mickey Foster.

Construction on the four-story, \$60 million cancer center on Page Road North, near Moore Regional Hospital, will begin in 2021 following completion of a four-story parking garage. The target opening date is November 2022. Foster estimates about \$30 million for the 120,000-square-foot center will be

raised through a philanthropy campaign launching in January. However, people have already been donating to the project since November.

"The rates for cancer in our 15 counties is expected to grow, so we need to build a comprehensive cancer center," says Foster, who joined FirstHealth in July after serving as president of Moses H. Cone Memorial Hospital in Greensboro. "I have had the opportunity to oversee several cancer programs in my

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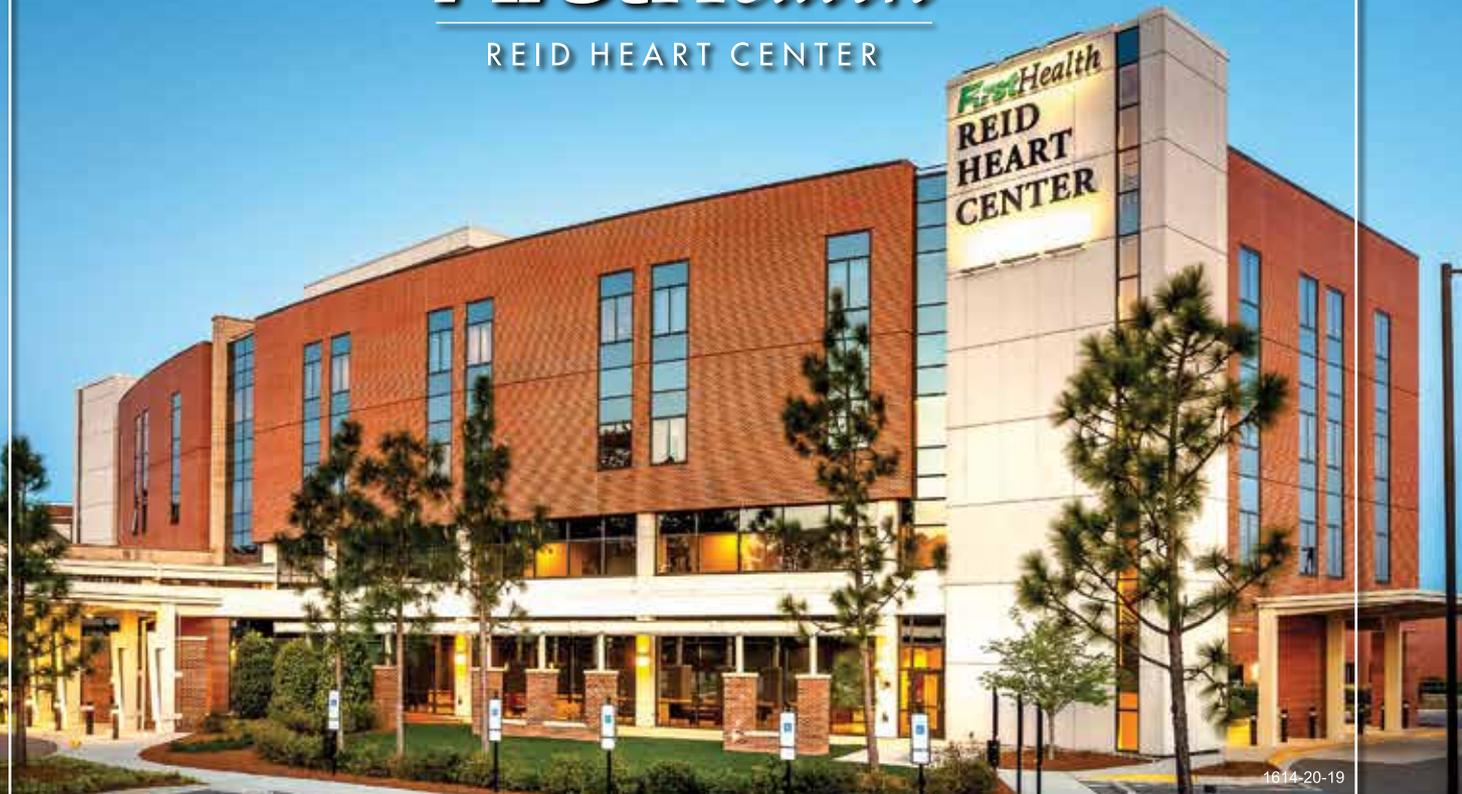
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REID HEART CENTER



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Reid Heart Center is located on the FirstHealth Moore Regional Hospital Campus in Pinehurst, NC.

COMMUNITY CLOSE-UP: MOORE COUNTY



Informal talks about a centralized cancer center in Moore County began four years ago but weren't concrete until last summer.

career, and there is a need to have all the support services under one roof. It creates a one-stop shop for care for all of our cancer patients."

Foster joined FirstHealth with three main goals: "First, we want to be the best place to work in the county. We are in the top 4% nationally [according to Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems], so we want to create the best culture. Second, we want to be a health system that is a zero-harm organization. There are still too many harm events in health care. We want to be a system with zero: no falls, no injuries, no infections. Third is to build a destination for cancer care."

Informal talks about a centralized cancer center began four years ago but weren't concrete until last summer.

"We have outstanding services, but they're spread out across our campus," says Dan Barnes, president of FirstHealth's physicians group and vice president of oncology services. "This [new center] allows patients to be seen from diagnosis to treatment to survivorship and be patient-centered and patient-focused. It allows us to bring physicians and treatment under one roof and increase support services such as financial counseling and palliative care."

The project received full support from the Pinehurst Village Council and the Village of Pinehurst, Foster says. Space will be reserved for meditation and support groups, as well as rooms designated for exercise. "We want to create a more healing and natural setting that will differentiate us from other places," he says. "It's a game changer for cancer care in this region."

One floor will house research and clinical trials, such as those headed by pulmonary specialist Michael Pritchett, director of the Chest Center of the Carolinas at FirstHealth and an employee of Pinehurst Medical Clinic. Last April, Pritchett was the first in the world to demonstrate work with a robotic-assisted catheter-based device to collect samples for lung cancer diagnosis.

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Pritchett performed his first procedure last March and as of mid-November, he had seen about 60 cases.

"We have the pathologist sitting in the room, so they put it on a slide, and we get immediate feedback as to whether it's malignant or not," he says. "So when I wake you up, we will tell you what we found. We can biopsy multiple lesions, so it's really a game changer for us."

The future cancer center's central location is imperative in reaching the 15-county area beyond the 16,000 people of Pinehurst, Pritchett says. "We don't want them to drive past us and have to go to Duke or UNC."

Pritchett isn't the only one working on research at the new cancer center. On the same floor in the building, gynecologic oncologist Michael Sundborg will continue administering a Gynecologic Oncology Group Foundation trial to assess a chemo treatment for advanced cervical cancer.

Sundborg has two patients enrolled in the six-month trial designed to prompt the immune system to seek and destroy cancer. The GOG Foundation chose FirstHealth to test the therapies in a hybrid trial, meaning it's sponsored by the National Cancer Institute and is an industry trial, so the medication is free. "We're shooting smart missiles. We're a sniper," Sundborg says. "This

is the evolution of cancer therapy."

Sundborg says Moore County has seen a 7% increase in cancer diagnoses annually, compared with a national average of about 3%. It's the leading cause of death, according to the 2018 State of the County Health Report. He attributes it to the region's relatively older population and patients in nearby rural coastal areas without access to care. "But we're doing something for them. We're changing life spans."

Both Sundborg and Pritchett have begun their research in their current roles, but the new cancer center will make "a substantial footprint" in care, Sundborg says.

Foster did not detail the number of jobs that may be created with the completion of the center but anticipates recruiting additional physicians, nurses, support staff and medical-office assistants for the new center. Health care and social assistance are listed by the N.C. Department of Commerce Labor & Economic Analysis Division as the top employers in the county with 9,457 workers, or 26.2% of the total workforce.

"I have plenty of offers all the time to go other places, and I have no desire to go anywhere," Pritchett says. "I can do all these things, [including] publish research, right here in my own community." ■



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(source is FirstHealth of the Carolinas and statistic are all from 2018).

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VETERAN VIABILITY

Veteran-owned businesses in Moore County see success thanks to a supportive community.

Lt. Col. Scott Greenblatt was born in New York, went to college in South Florida, served out of Fort Bragg from 2006 through 2017 as part of his 25 years of active duty in the Army and had 10 overseas deployments. He could have settled anywhere as a civilian, but memories from a 1996 visit

to Pinehurst and Southern Pines stayed with him when his Army career finished two years ago.

"I was working with some military students, and I had just graduated from college. I was in Southern Pines and went to some of the restaurants and played golf at Pinehurst, and I said, 'This is great. I want to live here someday,'" he says. "So later, I figured out how to manage my career and come back. Moore County offers a sense of value that's not replicated [in] different parts of the country."

Fort Bragg statistics show that about

7,000 of the 50,000 personnel stationed there transition out of active duty each year. The area's Soldiers For Life — Transition Assistance Program helps veterans navigate their options after service, including returning to school, starting a career or opening a business, and uses events such as last fall's Accessing Higher Education workshop and a hiring and education fair at its Iron Mike Conference Center.

For Greenblatt, post-Army life meant moving to Moore County with his wife and children and running his own business: a pre-filing consulting firm called



Many Fort Bragg servicemen choose to stay in the area and start their own businesses after transitioning to civilian life. Scott Greenblatt, second from the left, opened the Veterans Guardian VA Claim Consulting Firm after retiring from the Army.



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COMMUNITY CLOSE-UP: MOORE COUNTY



Veteran Greg Combs opened his bike shop, May Street Bicycles, in the 1980s after serving in the Army at Fort Bragg.

Veterans Guardian VA Claim Consulting, which helps veterans file for disability benefits.

He's not the only one. Dozens of veteran-run businesses are established in Moore County, from larger companies to one-man shows.

"I was deployed a lot, and now I've given my kids the security of staying here," Greenblatt says. "The personal toll in the post-9/11 environment is that I spent between eight and nine years deployed overseas. War is a business. It keeps the military moving. And if you're at Fort Bragg and you have younger kids, you don't want to keep moving them. Your spouse doesn't want to do that, and your friends are here. Your life is here."

Greenblatt's business in Pinehurst is staffed by veterans and military spouses. He also hires those who serve in the National Guard and Reserve, who may have difficulty elsewhere because of their schedules. "For someone who applies here, they don't have to hide their service," he says.

Greg Combs is sole proprietor of May Street Bicycles in Southern Pines. Originally from Pana, Ill., he served in the Army at Fort Bragg and started a home-based cycling shop in the 1980s. He rented a store on May Street for several years before buying a nearby

building in 2017.

"Being in and out of Fort Bragg, I'm a small-town kind of guy, and I do love the military so much, so I stuck with a location I'm comfortable with," he says. "It's pleasing to have the opportunity to help fellow veterans and active-duty [personnel] and their families. And just understand their perspective of life."

His shop offers a 10% military discount and 15% off on "Military Mondays."

Combs' love for biking is not new. When he was assigned to Fort Carson, Colo., he was in the midst of competitive-cycling training with Olympic hopefuls at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo., as part of the World Class Athlete Program, a military unit that supports nationally and internationally ranked soldiers who hope to compete in the Olympics. Combs won a bronze medal at the 1996 Olympic Trials but did not make the team in Atlanta.

"I did my best. I've been riding my whole life, and it was great cross-training while I was in the Army," he says.

His shop offers family and fitness bikes, and he fits and refurbishes them to meet his clients' needs. He has a Ph.D. from the University of Northern Colorado and taught business-related classes at Methodist University in Fay-

etteville from 2000 through 2014, when he resigned to focus on his shop.

"I would tell people, if you're going to start a bike shop, be financially stable to begin with because a small business can take a lot to up-fit and get going," he says. "I've been informally immersed in the business my whole life. And this is a tight-knit community that really pulls for each other."

Though Combs did not seek help from agencies that help business start-ups or any veteran groups, there are plenty available to others interested in starting a business.

Moore Alive, a marketing and recruitment initiative for economic development, lists support systems for incoming civilians, such as the Association of Bragg Spouses and Fort Bragg Wives on Facebook.

Veteran-owned businesses in Moore County include restaurants, breweries, construction and roofing companies, and several smaller organizations. Greenblatt and others meet monthly with the Sandhills Veteran-Owned Business Guild, a mentoring group to create camaraderie among veterans in the business world.

Greenblatt says he has 70 full-time employees at Veterans Guardian and is contacted by about 2,000 veterans a month. He partners with local charities and veterans' groups to donate money and spend time giving back. "We're talkers. We return calls; we get it done," he says. "We promise nothing, but our goal is to overdeliver. If we can't help you, we're going to be honest with you."

But, like Combs, he says the important thing is to be in a community where veterans and their families are needed and welcomed.

"Fort Bragg has a unique mission: special operations. It's a very unique skill set," he says. "That skill set is not replicated [throughout] the military. I could literally have put this business anywhere on the planet. You have this work ethic here. You have this melting pot. A lot of us help promote ourselves and each other and share experiences. There's a lot of camaraderie." ■

HARVESTING TECHNOLOGY

The Visit NC Farms phone app is promoting agritourism across the state.

Farming in Moore County is officially a part of the new age thanks to an app that makes it easier than ever to find agritourism stops in an area known for elite golf.

Moore County is the fifth area in the state to begin using Visit NC Farms, a location-specific mobile application for Androids and iPhones that helps promote agricultural businesses, local farms and restaurants using locally grown ingredients. People can use the app to find information such as hours of operation, tour times, costs and discounts.

The app, run by Yellow Dog Creative of Raleigh, cost \$5,500 to develop and \$300 per month to maintain, according to County Extension Director Deborah McGiffin of the Moore County Center of the N.C. Cooperative Extension. Businesses represented on the app pay \$72 per year, or \$6 per month.

"If you're looking for a farm that accepts guests, you can see what their hours are and what days of the week [they are open] and if there is any cost," McGiffin says. "It helps promote agriculture and helps teach people where their food comes from. You have people [who are] three- and four-generations removed from the farm, and they think their food comes from the grocery store."

Phil Werz, president and CEO of the Pinehurst, Southern Pines, Aberdeen Area Convention & Visitors Bureau,

The app works as a connect-the-dots excursion through Moore County, where people can explore farms and related venues like restaurants that serve local, farm-fresh food.

says 50 vendors are currently listed on the app, including hotels and local shops, to further encourage visitors to stay longer in Moore County and experience a breadth of options.

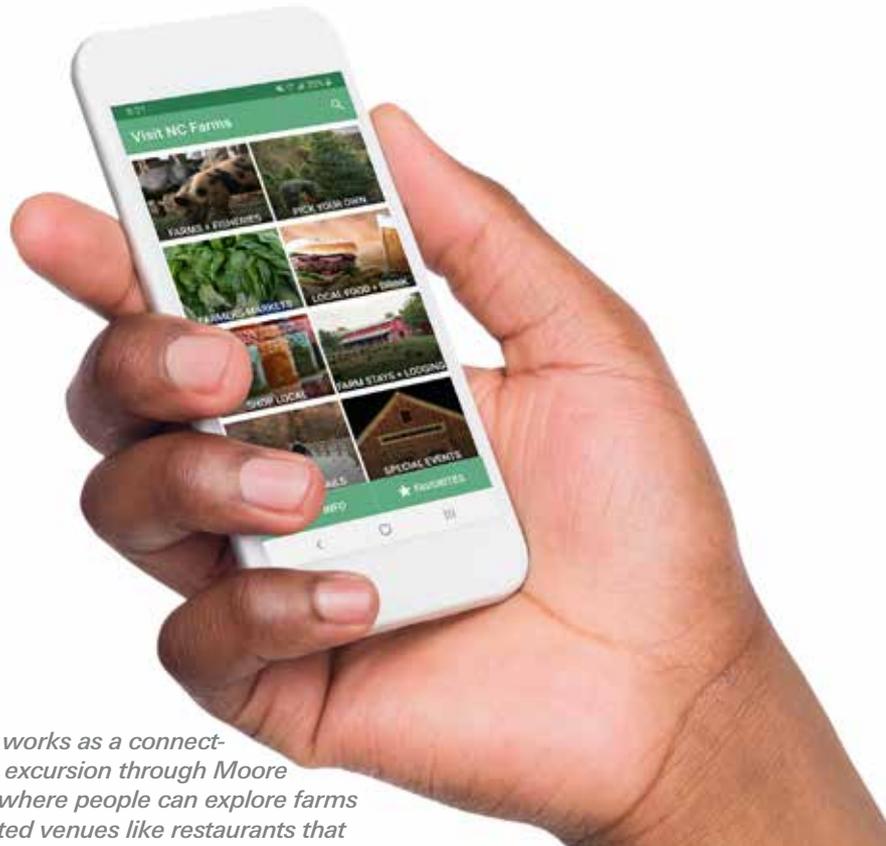
"Eighty-one percent of people who come to Pinehurst come to play golf," Werz says. "My job is to not only grow golf, but to grow that other 19%. With this app, we show that we're more than just golf."

Other areas in the state on the Visit NC Farms app include the Boone and Blowing Rock areas of Ashe, Watauga, Wilkes and Avery counties; Cleveland County; Johnston County; the five-

county Kerr-Tar region on the Virginia; Orange County; and Lee County.

The app's creation was paid for by an N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services grant, McGiffin says, which she applied for in the beginning of 2019. "Phil and the CVB have been very instrumental and gave us all the support in getting all the assets on the platform," she says. "We owe a lot to them."

In Moore, the app works as a connect-the-dots excursion through the county, where people can explore farms and related venues. Figures from last fall show success, with 508 app downloads in October, a 21% increase



COMMUNITY CLOSE-UP: MOORE COUNTY

from September. Data shows 290 downloads in July, 447 in August and 420 in September. Numbers especially rose during Labor Day weekend and the state fair.

"The farmers don't have a lot of time to market. We market," Werz says. "They're experts at what they do, and we're experts at what we do. We're bringing it into the modern day. A lot of people are on their phones all the time. And this is right at their fingertips."

Ryan Olufs and his wife, Gaby, own a 60-acre farm in Robbins, a town of about 1,200 residents 20 miles north of Pinehurst, where their family raises ostriches. Their Misty Morning Ranch is represented on the app, and Ryan Olufs was part of the county's agritourism initiative that helped with the launch. His farm offers tours, and he markets ostrich eggs and meat to local restaurants on the app.

"Moore County has an influx of outsiders, either from Fort Bragg or in

tourism associated with golf or nature, so the local people have heard of the ostrich farm, but many people coming into Moore County have not," he says. "It's great that the app has that feel of connectivity in that we all kind of know each other, and we can get tourists to know us, too. They can follow the app and see, for instance, at this restaurant, this cheese came from here [and] then go see that farm. And that farm may mention another farm. It's all connected to the community."

One restaurant partnering with the Olufs is Ashten's Restaurant in Southern Pines, whose website mentions food from local harvests and displays a "Hall of Farm" sign mentioning 15 area meat, produce and dairy suppliers.

The app lists farms and fisheries, farmers markets, farm-hosted bed-and-breakfasts, shop-local outlets, you-pick-it farms, restaurants, wineries and breweries, tours, trails, and special

events related to agriculture. Each location is marked on a map and has a brief description of the place and service. The app also lists each vendor's news, updates, hours and availability.

"At the CVB, we're interested in people who might be coming to Moore County," Werz says. "If you're coming through the state or passing through from Washington or Philadelphia, when you're not playing golf, this is something else you can use."

Businesses on the app can push deals encouraging visitors staying at certain hotels to visit their farms by offering discounts or free tours. The goal for everyone involved is to get out-of-towners to stay longer.

"The longer you stay, the more money you're going to spend, and the taxes go back into Moore County, so this can only go up," Olufs says. ■

— Kathy Blake is a freelance writer from eastern N.C.

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In 2015, N.C. voters approved the Connect NC Bond Act. One of the purposes of the bond was to build and renovate community college facilities for the benefit of students and to enhance

the economic attractiveness of the state. The \$3.8 million provided to Sandhills Community College by the bond, combined with private donations, allowed SCC to provide the region with a premier entertainment and educational facility.

Named for donors Stan and Jean Bradshaw, the Bradshaw Performing Arts Center provides the area with an unmatched venue for performing arts bringing musical, theatrical and visual arts to the Sandhills region. Owens Auditorium has been completely remodeled, and the improvement of three additional

venues will impact the enjoyment and cultural enrichment of college students and the community as a whole.

Their generosity, combined with the gifts of others and the bond funds, is enabling SCC to develop a four-venue facility that will help the community celebrate the performing arts and make the Sandhills region an even more vibrant place to live, work, grow and prosper. ■

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