

DuPage to get new cancer center

\$160 million facility will use proton therapy treatment

December 7, 2007

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Officials at Northern Illinois University are already looking forward to spring, when they will break ground on a \$160 million proton therapy cancer treatment and research center in DuPage County.

NIU's Board of Trustees announced the groundbreaking date Thursday along with a series of resolutions that enable the nonprofit Northern Illinois Proton Treatment and Research Center to move forward.

The center is scheduled to open in 2010 at the DuPage National Technology Park in West Chicago. It will treat up to 1,500 patients per year, according to the university.

Cherilyn Murer, a health care executive and chairwoman of the NIU Board of Trustees, said in a statement that NIU also hopes to lead particle therapy cancer research and train future proton therapy professionals.

The university is developing programs related to proton therapy in medical physics, oncology nursing, allied health fields, engineering, accelerator physics, radiation therapy and dosimetry, and residency and fellowship opportunities for physicians, she said.

"We seek to stretch that faculty so that we can combine academe with medical care," Murer said at the recent unveiling of another of the university's high-tech projects - the Illinois Rural Health Network, a high-speed Internet service connecting Chicago to rural hospitals statewide. "We're really focused at NIU in developing health care and technology, and they work hand in hand."

There are five proton therapy centers in the United States and none in Illinois, though Central DuPage Hospital hopes to open one in Winfield the same year as NIU's is scheduled to open.

Both centers are under review by the Illinois Health Facilities Planning Board.

University trustees encouraged the planning board to act quickly. They also recommended the proton therapy center make a land development agreement with the tech park's master developer, sign a contract with an equipment provider, and establish an affiliation with a health care provider.