NIU to break ground on $159M proton therapy center

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West Chicago, IL -

Northern Illinois University will host a groundbreaking ceremony for its $159 million proton treatment and research center at the facility’s site today.

Construction for the project is scheduled to begin at 777 Discovery Drive, West Chicago, in the DuPage National Technology Park next week with a expected completion date sometime in 2010.

“It’s a visualization of what we’ve been working on for four years,” said NIU board of trustees chair Cherilyn Murer. “We’re thrilled Northern Illinois University has brought this center of technology and research. It will bring another treatment option to cancer patients in the area.”

NIU recently spent two months winning final approval from the city and the DuPage Airport authority after presenting designs and schematics. The groundbreaking celebration ends a turbulent couple of months for NIU after feuding with Central DuPage Hospital, which had planned to build a similar facility in Warrenville. The Illinois state planning board turned down Central DuPage’s proposal in April.

“I am very relieved that we can move forward and move into next phase of development process,” said John Lewis, NIU associate vice president for outreach and project director. “It gives me increased assurance that we are on schedule and can meet our target timelines.”

NIU plans to partner with Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in Batavia, which in the late 1980s developed the first proton-therapy accelerator for cancer treatment.

NIU frequently collaborates with both Fermilab and Argonne National Laboratory and has been building a program in medical physics and related health practices.

NIU will have several speakers at the groundbreaking, including NIU president John Peters, West Chicago Mayor Michael Kwasman and cancer patients who have undergone proton therapy, university spokesman Tom Parisi said.

Proton therapy is considered the most precise radiation treatment available and minimizes damage to
body cells.

“This will provide a mode of treatment for cancer that is not available to residents in the upper Midwest,” Lewis said. “It will provide treatment that is unique for certain types of cancers. Proton therapy is really good at treating pediatric cancer and malignancies close to other vital organs.”