Proton therapy coming closer to area families

By KATE THAYER - Chronicle News Group

WEST CHICAGO - The family of Kelsey Borg, a recent Kaneland graduate, made sacrifices to help her beat a brain tumor four years ago.

But a treatment center being built in West Chicago could have made it a little easier - and it will for future families in the same situation.

Representatives from the public and private sectors, along with patients, gathered Thursday to mark the groundbreaking of the Northern Illinois Proton Treatment and Research Center. The West Chicago center will offer treatment that uses proton beams to treat tumors; it is the first of its kind in the state.

It's expected to open in about two years at the DuPage National Technology Park along Route 38.

Borg, 18, underwent such treatment in Boston when she was 14 after doctors discovered that she had a brain tumor. Her mother lived with her in Boston for the summer because there was no treatment facility near their Maple Park home.

"I missed my last summer with my brother before he went to college. I missed my last summer with friends before high school," she said. "I was lucky, though. I could go."

Some families may have been unable to make the trip, Borg said, adding that soon, that won't be a problem for Chicago-area families. Borg plans to begin college at Northern Illinois University in August and will study to be a speech language pathologist. She added that she could do follow-up treatments at the new West Chicago center.

University officials said they hope to partner with organizations that open family housing for patients receiving the therapy.

NIU President John Peters was among Thursday's speakers.

"I am convinced that today is historic," he said.

Also on Thursday, John Lewis, associate vice president of NIU Outreach, was named executive director of the treatment center.

Lewis said that when the center is complete, it will be one of eight in the country. Illinois will be the only state to have both proton- and neutron-therapy treatment centers, he said.
Now that construction is about to begin, Lewis will be planning other developments, such as staffing, at the center.

“I'm very excited about the challenges we face,” he said.