

# Program links Medical City jobs to west Orlando workers

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Orlando's Medical City holds the promise of thousands of jobs, but many have been out of reach for some Orlando residents who need work the most.

On Friday, Orlando leaders will announce a wide-ranging effort to help mostly low-income residents of west Orlando take advantage of opportunities in the health-care field.

"The medical field is expanding, and we have to prepare for the future," said Orlando Commissioner Daisy Lynam, who initiated the program. "We have to incubate the future work force."

The goal is a big one: Bolster science education at the youngest ages; continue it through high school; get those students ready for college and medical school; steer would-be nurses into accelerated-training programs; provide space for clinical rotations; and, of course, create jobs.

More than a year ago, Lynam met with an executive from Nemours Children's Hospital with the hope of finding job opportunities at the hospital for residents of Parramore and other underemployed parts of her district.

Nemours Chief Administrative Officer Randy Hartley was an immediate ally.

"I come from a fairly disadvantaged background myself and had people look out for me at an early age when they didn't have to," he said. "Her message resonated with me, and one thing led to another."

With the help of Mayor Buddy Dyer, others signed on. During the past year, the city has quietly formed partnerships with Orange County Public Schools, Florida Hospital, Orlando Health, the University of Central Florida, Florida State University, Valencia College, Orlando Tech and Workforce Central Florida.

The program also seeks to remove one of biggest barriers for potential workers: distance. The Medical City in Lake Nona is home to Nemours, the UCF medical school, the VA Medical Center now under construction, Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute and more. But it's in the southeastern corner of the city, more than 20 miles from Parramore and other west Orlando neighborhoods, where many potential workers don't have reliable transportation.



Nemours Children's Hospital (Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda)

In April, Lynx will launch a commuter service connecting its main station downtown to Medical City, with bus service built around shift changes. The funding, \$562,000 over two years, is being split between the city and the state.

Some of those workers will fill support roles — maintenance workers, janitors, administrative assistants — as the Medical City grows into a major employment center. But the program has a larger goal of preparing future generations of Orlando residents for medical careers.

"If we don't position folks to take advantage of these opportunities, there's a whole generation that will miss out," Orlando Chief Administrative Officer Byron Brooks said.

Earlier this year, the city provided funding to pay for a science teacher to provide weekly instruction to students at Rock Lake and Orange Center elementary schools. The hands-on lessons in a science lab are supplementary, on top of the science instruction already taught.

Those elementary schools feed into Jones High School, which already has a medical-arts magnet program. UCF College of Medicine has a mentoring program there and a weeklong summer program with hands-on science and college prep.

Florida State University is bringing to Jones High an elective college-prep program that includes after-school tutoring, parent meetings, mentoring from medical students, educational trips and more.

Orlando Tech, the vocational center operated by Orange schools, opened 10 new slots for students recruited through the city's Blueprint office, which seeks to find jobs for residents of Parramore, the homeless and ex-offenders.

Last week, the students began a yearlong program that will allow them to take the exam to be a licensed practical nurse. At the same time, under a curriculum specifically developed for this program, they'll also be enrolled at Valencia College, where they'll take prerequisite courses for Valencia's nursing program. After Orlando Tech, students can begin an accelerated program at Valencia that will allow them to take the registered-nurse exam.

"Many people have worked really hard on this project," said Paula Pritchard, Valencia's dean of nursing. "We want to allow this underserved community to move into careers that would give them financial opportunities."

Nemours plans to offer educational and job-search workshops and hold career events for high-school students. Along with Florida Hospital and Orlando Health, Nemours will provide space for clinical rotations where students can continue their training. The hospitals also will accept job referrals from the city's Blueprint employment office.

"The medical profession in our area is continuing to grow," said Mike Armbruster, senior executive director of career and technical education for OCPS. "The need for trained and

qualified workers is there. These are jobs that can give them a living wage, and that's a powerful thing."

[mschlueb@tribune.com](mailto:mschlueb@tribune.com) or 407-420-5417