Dr. Mary Norton, a 2013 graduate of Florida State’s College of Medicine, teaches first and second year students and still finds time to serve in health clinics at Gadsden County Schools.

But her real passion as a pediatrician is connecting with families.

Next year, Norton will get to do just that as she practices out of FSU PrimaryHealth, the college’s medical center planned for Roberts Avenue and Eisenhower Street in southwest Tallahassee.

On Thursday, Dr. Mary Norton joined FSU President John Thrasher, Dean Dr. John P. Fogarty and a host of elected officials for a groundbreaking ceremony for the 10,000-square-foot medical facility expected to open early next year.

“This is where I will do my clinical time,” Norton said of the neighborhood dotted with homes and businesses. “I enjoy working with families to help their children thrive. I find working with families very rewarding.”
FSU PrimaryHealth will include 15 patient exam rooms, two rooms for behavioral-health services, two health-procedure rooms and a community room.

It is designed to meet the needs of lower to moderate income residents living in southwest Tallahassee, where residents have no immediate health center nearby.

“We’re breaking ground today, but this facility has been a vision for this College of Medicine for many years,” said Fogarty, a family physician. “Our faculty members will have an opportunity at FSU PrimaryHealth to maintain their practice skills, get valuable interaction with patients and their families, and teach and mentor both medical and PA students in a clinical setting across the entirety of their time at the College of Medicine.”

More: FSU College of Medicine eyes site near Sabal Palm for clinic

Anicia Robinson, principal at nearby Sabal Palm Elementary School, said she welcomes the center, as it joins the school as being more than just a structure in the community.

“This will be their medical family,” she said of the neighborhood’s residents. “It’s priceless. The amount of services that will be available to the community is amazing. Everything is in their own backyard.”

Childers Construction Co. is the contractor for the $3-million center, which was designed by Elena Bradbury with DAG Architects.

The center initially will have seven medical providers and will increase its staff as the operations becomes fully operational. A full range of medical and mental health counseling services will be available.

While the medical center will operate independently, it also will be partners Sabal Palm, as a community school concept solidifies.
Palm, as a community school concept solidifies.

From Left to Right: Leon County Commissioner Jimbo Jackson, Dr. Daniel J Van Durme, FSU College of Medicine; FSU President John Thrasher; FSU College of Medicine Dean John P. Fogarty; Anicia Robinson, principal, Sabal Palm Elementary School at the May 17, 2018 groundbreaking for FSU PrimaryHealth. (Photo: Byron Dobson/Democrat)

Equally important is the presence of a full-fledged medical center for the college’s staff, who now practice at other medical centers or through Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare.

“We had people in clinics, but we were invisible in the community,” Fogarty said. “This provides us a visible approach in the community.”

Thrasher, who was instrumental in securing funding for the medical school, where a building is named for him, said the center will be an example of its mission.

“We are providing a medical home to people who have not had access to health care,” he said.

Leon County Commissioner Jimbo Jackson, who is also principal at Fort Braden School, said families not only need the medical center, but “they deserve it.”

“This is like a dream come true,” he said.

The college holds its 14th class graduation Saturday.

Contact senior writer Byron Dobson at bdobson@tallahassee.com or on Twitter @byrondobson.