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UNMC to hold groundbreaking ceremony for Wigton Heritage Center on Monday

Facility will celebrate/memorialize UNMC's history, while serving as a campus welcome center

The University of Nebraska Medical Center will hold a ceremony at 11 a.m. on Monday, June 24, to celebrate the groundbreaking for the Wigton Heritage Center and the launch of the renovation of Wittson Hall.



The total cost of the dual project is \$26 million. Renovation of Wittson Hall will cost \$18 million with state funding provided by LB 957. Philanthropic support will cover the \$8 million construction cost of the Wigton Heritage Center. The University of Nebraska Foundation continues to seek contributions for the programmatic costs associated with the Wigton Heritage Center.

Renovation of Wittson Hall has already begun. Construction of the Wigton Heritage Center will begin this summer. Completion of Wittson Hall will be in the second half of 2020, and the Wigton Heritage Center is planned to open in the first quarter of 2021.

The 10,000-square-foot, four-level Wigton Heritage Center will celebrate and memorialize UNMC's history, while also serving as a campus welcome center. In addition, the project will replace the existing walkways between Wittson Hall and University Tower. The buildings will be connected through a multi-floor space.

Major funding for the Wigton Heritage Center has been committed by Robert Wigton, M.D., a 1969 alumnus of the College of Medicine who served as professor in internal medicine at UNMC and in

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several key administrative areas in the College of Medicine, including associate dean for graduate medical education. The Wigton legacy spans three generations with several physicians within the family serving UNMC.

The Leland J. and Dorothy H. Olson Charitable Foundation also provided a generous gift in support of the Wigton Heritage Center project. Leland Olson, M.D., and Dorothy Hodges Olson, both deceased, were University of Nebraska alumni and major contributors to UNMC for a variety of women's health and university initiatives. Dr. Olson, a respected obstetrician and gynecologist in Omaha, was a volunteer UNMC physician staff member and mentored medical interns in his practice.

“This project is yet another important example of how public-private partnerships have helped UNMC flourish and fulfill its statewide mission to transform lives,” said UNMC Chancellor Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D. “The Wigton Heritage Center will be a transformational gathering place, where we can welcome guests, host events and meet with friends and colleagues.

“We are grateful for the support of the private donors who make this project possible. Their UNMC legacies span multiple generations of service at UNMC. Their commitment to building the Wigton Heritage Center enables us to highlight the unique history of the medical center and the important role it has played both in the state and global leadership throughout medical education.”

Some of the features of the Wigton Heritage Center include:

- Meeting and reception space for events;
- Interactive displays such as archives, instruments and books that pertain to the history of medicine at UNMC;
- Open collaboration, meeting and seating space; and
- A link to the McGoogan Library of Medicine from University Tower.

Emily McElroy, director of the McGoogan Library of Medicine, said the Wigton Heritage Center will allow the library to take previously-hidden prized collections, artifacts, archives and rare books and showcase them to the public.

“The Wigton Heritage Center will serve as a catalyst for understanding, experiencing and appreciating UNMC’s unique heritage,” McElroy said. “Our special collections will come alive to educate, engage and enlighten visitors on topics like women in medicine, prominent alumni contributions and much more.

“The people who have walked through these doors for generations – faculty, preceptors, students, researchers, administrators and community champions – have left their marks, and in doing so, have defined UNMC’s past, present and future. We are telling the story of UNMC’s history and outstanding medical achievements that have affected the lives of countless Nebraskans.”

Monday’s groundbreaking ceremony will take place inside the Truhlsen Events Center on the first floor of the Sorrell Center at 42nd and Emile streets.