

Texas State gets \$6 million to create nursing program
St. David's foundation gift could help state meet pressing need.

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Texas State University is a step closer to filling a statewide need for more nurses.

St. David's Community Health Foundation is expected to announce this morning that it will donate \$6 million to Texas State University-San Marcos for a nursing school program at its Round Rock Higher Education Center.

The money will supply three-quarters of the \$8 million needed for faculty, lab equipment and other start-up costs. Officials hope the first students will be admitted in 2010, after faculty members apply to the Texas Board of Nurse Examiners to create the program, said Ruth Welborn, dean of Texas State's College of Health Professionals.

Increasing access to health care is the foundation's mission, and "we saw a good way to give back to the community and accelerate the opening of the school in Round Rock," said Dick Moeller, president and CEO of the foundation.

Texas will need 138,000 new nurses in the next seven to 10 years, according to a 2005 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report compiled by Texas State.

Texas State has been planning the nursing program for at least the past two years and has lobbied the Legislature for funding.

In the past special session, the Legislature and Gov. Rick Perry approved nearly \$1.9 billion in bonds for college construction projects, but that money has yet to be appropriated.

Texas State asked for \$40 million for the nursing school during the last session but may only get \$36 million when the money is finally divided up, Welborn said. State Rep. Mike Krusee, R-Williamson County, said during his campaign that he will push for state money for the nursing school in the next session. The university hopes to have the building finished and its first class of 100 admitted in fall 2010, officials said.

A growing population and an aging workforce are driving the need for more nurses, said John Foster, CEO of St. David's HealthCare, which operates seven hospitals across Central Texas.

"We think that the funding of a nursing school at Texas State is very important to the future of our nursing workforce in Central Texas," he said.

In addition, "more hospitals will mean more demand for nurses and doctors," he said.

According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, in the 2003-04 school year, 2,529 students were enrolled in undergraduate and graduate school nursing programs in Texas.

Central Texas has six schools with nursing programs: the University of Texas, Austin Community College, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton, Central Texas College in Killeen, Temple College and McLennan Community College in Killeen.

Barry Meza, a registered nurse and emergency room supervisor at St. David's Medical Center in Austin, said that when he applied to schools five years ago, it was extremely hard to get in to one in Central Texas. He was

put on a two-year waiting list at a school that he declined to name and never heard back, he said. Meanwhile, he applied to Central Texas College and received an associate's degree in nursing in May 2002, he said.

"I think there are enough schools, but I don't think there are enough instructors in nursing," Meza said. As a result, the schools "just aren't taking on as many students as they could."

That problem has prompted Seton Family of Hospitals and St. David's HealthCare to collaborate on a program that provides faculty to ACC, said Gail Acuña, director of workforce development at St. David's HealthCare. That agreement was renewed last month.

St. David's HealthCare and other hospital networks have said they are committed to providing hands-on training for Texas State students.

"With the growth in the population, this is a benefit to really all citizens of Central Texas but particularly hospitals that are here" and on the way, Foster said.

Denise Trauth, president of Texas State, said the university is eager to move forward with the program.

When she heard the news, "it was a combination of joy, surprise and deep gratitude to the St. David's foundation for making this possible," she said. "We will begin quickly to search for a director of the school of nursing."

That person will hire faculty and decide on curriculum, additional faculty, admission criteria for students, clinical rotations, supervision and evaluation, Welborn said.

St. David's Community Health Foundation hopes its gift will encourage others to donate money to support the establishment of the school, Moeller said.

Growing need for nurses

- Texas will need 138,000 new nurses in the next seven to 10 years, and more than 1.2 million new and replacement nurses will be needed nationwide by 2014, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in 2005.
- The average age of registered nurses has climbed steadily in recent years, according to American Nurses Association statistics. One-third of registered nurses in the U.S. are older than 50.
- Texas has 609 nurses for every 100,000 residents, while the national average is 782 per 100,000, the University of Texas Health Science Center Houston said in 2005.
- Texas schools turned away 4,200 qualified applicants to college nursing programs in the 2003-04 school year, the UT Health Science Center in Houston said in December 2005.

Source: Texas State University-San Marcos

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