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Empty Schumpert campus to get new life

Lex Talamo, alexa.talamo@shreveporttimes.com Published 2:42 p.m. CT July 12, 2017 | **Updated 5:58 p.m. CT July 12, 2017**

(Photo: Lex Talamo/The Times)

The Christus Schumpert St. Mary Place campus soon will aid LSU Health Shreveport in furthering its mission of education, patient care and research.

Christus Health Northern Louisiana and LSU Health representatives announced Wednesday plans for the campus to open as an integrated health care campus.

The vision for this new campus includes creating a health care hub with expanded patient care services, expanding pharmaceutical research and clinical trials and enhancing the educational experience of LSU Health Shreveport students.

Christus Health announced in June that it donated the old Schumpert hospital, which has been sitting dormant since it closed in 2013, to a newly created nonprofit, Margaret Place Properties.

William Comegys III, spokesman for the nonprofit, said during a press conference that Margaret Place Properties is in the process of obtaining health-care related tenants and working to determine what space can be used by the medical school.

"Nothing is definitive at this point," he said. "We were asked to do it by the medical school, and we found out (about the donation) at the end of May."

More: Unknown changes coming to Schumpert's St. Mary Place hospital (/story/news/2017/06/30/unknown-changes-coming-schumperts-st-mary-place-hospital/444213001/)

The donation includes the 18-acre hospital facility, several adjacent medical office buildings and a parking garage – a total of about 206,000 square feet.

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Christus Senior Vice President Stephen Wright congratulates LSU Health Shreveport chancellor G.E. Ghali on the collaboration of the health center with Christus Shreveport-Bossier Health System and Margaret Place Properties. (Photo: Lex Talamo/The Times)

Christus also announced a one-time monetary gift to the non-profit of up to $6.5 million, over three years, to defray initial operating and renovation costs.

A Christus press release noted that the donated property would be leased to both non-profit and for-profit health care educational entities, health care providers and health care research entities.

Dr. G.E. Ghali, chairman of the Department of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery and chancellor at the LSU Health Shreveport Health Sciences Center, had more specific details about potential use of the beloved hospital campus and how it would further the health center's missions of excellence in patient care, education and research.

Expanding patient care

Ghali, who arrived at the press conference late because he was administering emergency surgery to a patient, said the public can expect several health care clinics to start popping up in the area – including a new orthopedic sports medicine clinic headed by Dr. Shane Barton, the current chairman of the Orthopedic Clinic on Youree Drive.

More: Grace Home 'family' saddened by hospice changes (/story/news/2017/05/10/grace-home--hospice-changes-christus-schumpert/101506282/)

"It provides an opportunity for our faculty at the center to have an additional site where they can practice," he said. "It also really improves access for the patients."

Benefits of the Margaret Place location, in addition to access, include increased parking for patients, a recurring complaint from those who received care at the health center, Ghali said.

One immediate space need is for a specialty clinic that needed to be moved closer to the LSU Health Shreveport main campus. Serious negotiations started in early July, based on the June 30 donation date, according to a center press release.

Expanding educational opportunities

Ghali said the donation also will strengthen LSU Health Center's School of Medicine. The extra space or the programs and clinics will allow more graduates to stay in the center's community following graduation. The campus' extra space also might come to include student housing, Ghali said.

"Many of our local physicians were trained at the LSU School of Medicine, so we know it's a benefit to the community to have access to LSU Health Shreveport," he said.

Three professional schools comprise LSU Health Shreveport: the School of Medicine, the School of Allied Health Professions and the School of Graduate Studies. The medical center also has more than 40 accredited residency and fellowship programs.

LSU Health Shreveport's makes a $3 billion economic impact on North Louisiana each year, according to a center press release.

Expanding research initiatives

Ghali also hopes to extend LSU Health Center's research initiatives, including a coming study in collaboration with the National Institutes of Health and Southern and Grambling universities into health care disparities for minorities.

The health center also is looking to establish simulation labs and technology as part of ongoing research initiatives, Ghali said.

The hospital's infrastructure and good condition will make for an easy transition.

"It's not a novel idea. It's been done around the country, where they've taken empty hospitals and re-purposed them," Ghali said. "The infrastructure is set up so it will take very little money to convert to a space that can be usable."

Stephen Wright, Christus senior vice president of group operations, said the donation will help the Schumpert become a "vibrant focal point" for medical training and health-related services.

"The repurposing of this campus will contribute to neighborhood revitalization as well as improved health status of the community," Wright said.

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Christus Health Northern Louisiana announced Friday it donated the hospital campus to the nonprofit, Margaret Place Properties. (Photo: Henrietta Wildsmith/The Times)

The birth of Margaret Place Properties

Ghali said he approached Comegys, whom he knew from the community and trusted, about forming a non-profit to accept the Christus donation.

He also reached out to the non-profit's other two stakeholders – local entrepreneur Matthew St. Amant and TMR Exploration President Ray Lasseigne – to form the Margaret Place Properties three-member board.

Ghali said the three men reflected on his pitch, then came back to him with a condition.

"They thought about it and said 'Sure,' but only if any potential profit would go to the health center," he said. "They have to cover the overhead costs, but they don't want any profit from this. And I can promise you that the health center will do all it can to maximize this donation."

Ghali said it would be "easier" for a nonprofit, rather than the medical school, to quickly get the hospital back in working order. Donations to medical centers have strict regulations, whereas non-profits are not required to go through a lengthy process to justify every expense, he said.

"This was something Christus needed to have done on a timeline," Ghali said. "We were made aware of this possibility in April, and we were able to make it happen in two, three months."

Ghali said neither he nor the medical school will have any authority over Margaret Place Properties, which is a completely separate entity. Details about the interactions between the medical centers and the nonprofit still have to be worked out.

Margaret Place Properties will be responsible for maintenance of the buildings and Vintage Realty is handling the marketing of the available properties.

Comegys said the nonprofit is grateful to Christus for the chance to help LSU Health Shreveport expand its mission.

"As a lifelong resident of Shreveport, it is an honor to play a role in seeing that this property continues to play a vital part in our community," he said.

At the press conference, Christus also said it had donated two empty lots of land and the former Christus Breast Center building, on Olive Street, to the Diocese of Shreveport.

Christus also donated equipment and supplies from the old hospital to more than 100 local non-profits – including the MLK Health Center, Robinson's Rescue and the Northwest Louisiana Interfaith Pharmacy.

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Christus also donated two empty lots of land and the former Christus Breast Center building on Olive Street to the Diocese of Shreveport. (Photo: Lex Talamo/The Times)

Isaac Palmer, CEO of Christus, said the donations were a continuation of the ministry begun by Dr. T.E. Schumpert more than 120 years ago.

"We wanted the campus to be used in a way that would be constructive for the community at large, as well as the Highland neighborhood," Palmer said. "That it also contributes to the stabilization and growth of LSU Health Shreveport is even better. This is a win-win."

MORE: (/story/money/2016/10/08/new-brf-lsu-deal-much-better-both-sides-say/91685752/) What do BRF, LSU get out of the new deal (/story/money/2016/10/08/new-brf-lsu-deal-much-better-both-sides-say/91685752/)

LSU Health Shreveport has been locked in conflict with the operator of the former University Hospital, long the medical school's main teaching hospital, since the State of Louisiana forced it to cede ownership and management of the hospital to a private non-profit, BRF.

LSU Health Shreveport has complained about the loss of hospital revenue, formerly used to subsidize medical school operations. It also has complained about financial arrangements with BRF that the medical school says are unfair.

Another of LSU Health Shreveport's complaints has been that it must pay unfairly high rent to BRF (/story/news/2017/04/28/lsu-health-shreveport-brf-disagree-over-lease-amounts/99117048/) for space for its researchers.

It wasn't immediately clear what LSU Health Shreveport's future use of the Schumpert hospital building would mean for the medical school's collaboration with BRF and the former University Hospital, now operated as University Health.

Those interested in leasing or purchasing space:

Contact: Sarona Snyder at Vintage Realty at ssnyder@vintagerealty.com

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