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Cleveland Clinic nears opening of cancer, neurology center



Cleveland Clinic Florida is finishing construction of a \$90 million cancer and neurological center at its Weston campus that will help streamline services for patients.

By **Donna Gehrke-White**

Sun Sentinel

contact the reporter

Cleveland Clinic Florida is finishing construction of a \$90 million cancer and neurological center at its Weston campus to accommodate a growing patient load.

The clinic expects to open the 143,000-square-foot Egil and Pauline Braathen Center late next month. It will house both the expanding Pauline Braathen Neurological Center and the Maroone Cancer Center.

The Clinic expects double-digit growth in the number of neurological and cancer patients. Cancer cases are rising by about 1,400 a year, or about 10 percent. The numbers could climb even more with a new oncology radiation department, the Clinic says.

The new building will give patients one spot for all of their doctors' appointments, physical therapy, radiation treatment and tests, said Dr. Nestor Galvez, chairman of the neurological institute at Cleveland Clinic Florida. Now patients have to go to another building for physical therapy, and some must leave the campus for radiation treatment.

Oncologists, surgeons, neurologists and psychiatrists also will have offices in the new building and will be able to work together, sharing information, Galvez said.

About 230 construction workers have worked on the glassy five-story building since November 2013. To get it finished, crews have been working on the construction site seven day a week, with work stopping only for Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day, said Eric Gass, senior project manager for the project's contractor, Turner Construction. This week, crews were grading the soil that will be underneath the new building's front entranceway and roadways as one of the last steps before it opens.



Construction crews work outside the front entrance to the new Cleveland Clinic Florida's neurological and cancer center. (Taimy Alvarez / Sun Sentinel)

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"It's moving at a very rapid pace," he said. "This is a fast-track project. The guys have done an amazing job."

The construction workers were committed to working extra to finish on time, Gass said. "This is a project that will save lives," he said. "Everyone rallied for the mission," with most workers knowing someone who has cancer or a neurological disorder, Gass added.

The workers were also pumped by a couple of visits by race car driver Ryan Hunter-Reay, who won the Indianapolis 500 last year.

In November, Hunter-Reay announced a \$2.5 million joint donation from his nonprofit organization, Racing for Cancer, and Fort Lauderdale-based retailer AutoNation, which has partnered with him to raise funds to fight cancer. The new cancer center's lobby will be named for his mom, Lydia Hunter-Reay, who died of colon cancer in 2009 after being in and out of Broward hospitals.

To promote the new medical facility, Hunter-Reay even parked his pace car at the construction site, Gass said.

Others have been just as committed to the new cancer and neurological center. Long-time patient Pauline Braathen gave \$30 million — or a third of the construction cost. She previously had established a multimillion-dollar fund to support Cleveland Clinic Florida's Neurology program and set up the Egil and Pauline M. Braathen Endowed Chair in Neurology that Dr. Galvez holds.

London-born Braathen worked as a model and fashion designer. Her late husband, Egil, was from Norway and made his fortune in real estate. He died in 2009 from Alzheimer's.

The Maroone family — led by the patriarch, car dealer Al Maroone — also gave a multimillion-dollar donation to Cleveland Clinic for the new cancer center that bears the family name.

The new cancer and neurology center will employ 80 new workers, with salaries averaging \$80,000. The Clinic says the center will have an economic impact of \$6.4 million per year.

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Rodolfo Exposito mixes terroxy material for pouring onto the third floor elevator lobby leading into the check-in and check-out patient area. (Taimy Alvarez / Sun Sentinel)

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