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For Immediate Release

Helena To Get \$4 Million Health Education Center *Center, Plus New School Building, Cause Community Celebration*

HELENA, AR (Sept. 3, 2004) – There was no singing the blues in Helena today with the announcement of a new \$4 million, 25,000 square foot Delta Area Health Education Center (Delta AHEC) that will soon be built, providing classrooms, meeting rooms, a youth center, a medical library, and both indoor and outdoor walking tracks.

Groundbreaking for the center, a part of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, will be later this fall, with its opening set for fall, 2005.

Earlier in the day Helena residents witnessed the ribbon cutting of a new \$2.3 million building housing the KIPP Delta College Preparatory School, a public charter school that since its establishment in 2002 has already raised language skills of its students from the 17th percentile to the 49th.

For this poor Delta city that is working to transform itself back into the vibrant Southern town that it once was, it was a day of celebration.

The new Delta AHEC will be located in West Helena on bypass 49 and highway 242. The new building was made possible through financing provided by Southern Development Bancorporation and a \$4 million loan guarantee from the United States Department of Agriculture. The building will be owned by the Helena Health Foundation, which will lease the building to the Delta AHEC.

“It is like a dream-come-true. With our expanded facility, we will be able to better serve our constituents and help them live healthier, more productive lives. This is a much appreciated development for this part of the state,” said Becky Hall, Director of Delta AHEC.

The Delta AHEC had been operating in what Hall described as “a much too crowded 4,500 square foot building.”

Phil Baldwin, President and Chief Executive Officer of Southern Development Bancorporation, said the new Delta AHEC building is an example of the current movement to rebuild the Delta.

“Residents of the Delta are beginning to witness visible signs of progress. Today’s announcement of the new health center is yet another positive sign that we are rebuilding the Delta from inside out. It is exciting and fulfilling to play a small part in this life-altering movement,” Baldwin said.

Officially established on July 1, 2001, the Delta AHEC serves seven counties in the Arkansas Delta: Phillips, St. Francis, Lee, Chicot, Desha, Monroe and Crittenden. It is one of seven AHECs in Arkansas, all part of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS). The Delta AHEC was created by Arkansas legislation through use of Arkansas tobacco settlement funds.

The Delta AHEC meets health educational needs of the most underserved people in the Delta, serving as a bridge between the Delta and the resources of UAMS. Through Delta AHEC, the Delta has the opportunity to take ownership of its health problems, and with the guidance of the UAMS regional programs, to improve its health statistics and the future of its communities.

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