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For Immediate Release

Helena-West Helena Celebrate By Breaking Ground For \$4 Million UAMS Health Education Center

Helena Health Foundation Center To Open In Early 2006

WEST HELENA, AR (Feb. 24, 2005) – Helena-West Helena and residents from surrounding counties celebrated today with the groundbreaking for a new \$4 million Delta Area Health Education Center (Delta AHEC). Expected to be completed in early 2006, the center, one of seven AHECs in Arkansas operated by the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS), will provide classrooms, meeting rooms, a youth center, a medical library, and both indoor and outdoor walking tracks.

The new 25,000 square foot Center will be over five and one-half times larger than the current AHEC. It will be located in West Helena on bypass 49 and highway 242. The existing 4,500 square foot Delta AHEC is at 119 Hickory Hill Drive in Helena.

The building is owned by the Helena Health Foundation, which will lease the building to the UAMS Delta AHEC. It was made possible through financing

provided by Southern Bancorp and a \$4 million loan guarantee from the United States Department of Agriculture.

Helena Health Foundation Executive Director P. Vasudevan said the Center signals a new day in healthcare for Delta residents.

“This team effort is the result of compassionate people who were determined to provide better healthcare in the Delta. This will improve the quality of life for thousands, and save many lives, as well,” Vasudevan said.

The UAMS Delta AHEC/Vasudevan Wellness Center is the first of many major healthcare programs to be undertaken by the Helena Health Foundation, according to Helena Health Foundation Chairman Victor Juengel.

“Our mission is to help in providing improved healthcare for the people of our community, with particular emphasis on the indigent citizens,” Juengel said.

UAMS Chancellor I. Dodd Wilson, M.D., said, “UAMS is pleased to partner with the people of Helena, the Helena Health Foundation, Southern Bancorp and Senator Lincoln as we fulfill our mission to serve people across our state.”

Phil Baldwin, President and Chief Executive Officer of Southern Bancorp, 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.

Senator Blanche Lincoln, a Helena native, helped secure the USDA grant from the federal government. On hand for the groundbreaking, she expressed her personal thoughts.

“It’s important that our families receive the best possible start in life,” Senator Blanche Lincoln said. “I’m proud to have been a part of this coordinated effort to find the necessary funding to expand Delta AHEC so that this new facility will provide area residents with the health care opportunities they deserve.”

Director of the Delta AHEC is Becky Hall. She said, “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.”

Architect for the building is Polk Stanley Rowland Curzon Porter Architects of Little Rock.

Tommy Polk, president of the architectural firm, said there will be four distinctive areas of the building: library, administration/clinic, classrooms and adult/children exercise areas (which can double as a large meeting space).

Polk described the building’s design, “We made the library/lobby as the central hub of the building from which all other activities flow. We wanted to stress that learning, expressed by the library, is the key to a better, healthier life for all who are seeking it at Delta AHEC. The four wings, housing different functions, are clearly expressed in their design. The building will be filled with light to promote wellness and clean living and will feature a screening area for diabetes, an overhead walking track, exercise area and a child care area.”

In addition to Polk Stanley Rowland Curzon Porter Architects, the design/construction team includes: civil engineer: Cline-Frazier Consulting Engineers of Helena; structural engineer: Engineering Consultants Inc. of Little Rock; mechanical and electrical engineers: TME, Inc. of Little Rock, and general contractor: G.A.G. Builders, Inc. of Cabot.

The Arkansas AHEC program was founded in 1973 through efforts of the governor, the state Legislature and UAMS. As part of UAMS Regional Programs, it is the primary educational outreach effort of UAMS and the principal means of decentralizing medical and other health professions education throughout the state.

The seven centers – in El Dorado, Fayetteville, Fort Smith, Jonesboro, Pine Bluff, Texarkana and now West Helena – serve as training sites for students in the fields of medicine, nursing, pharmacy and various allied health professions as well as for resident physicians specializing in family practice. The AHEC training approach emphasizes primary care, which covers general health education and basic medical care for the whole family.

The Delta AHEC, created by Arkansas legislation through use of Arkansas tobacco settlement funds, was established on July 1, 2001, and serves seven counties in the Arkansas Delta: Phillips, St. Francis, Lee, Chicot, Desha, Monroe and Crittenden.

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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