

Banner cancer center in Gilbert breaks ground

David Woodfill, Tribune
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Work began on the M.D. Anderson Banner Cancer Center on the campus of Banner Gateway Medical Center, 1900 N. Higley Road, Gilbert. Dec. 1, 2009. This is an artist's rendering of the facility.

SUBMITTED PHOTO



Arizona House Speaker Kirk Adams speaks during a groundbreaking ceremony for the MD Anderson Banner Cancer Center in Gilbert on Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2009.

Thomas Boggan, Tribune

Work is under way on the highly touted \$107 million M.D. Anderson Banner Cancer Center in Gilbert.

Executives from Banner Health and the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center joined local politicians at a ceremonial ground-breaking on Tuesday, although work actually started about two weeks ago. The 120,000-square-foot, three-story outpatient center is on the Banner Gateway Medical Center campus at U.S. 60 and Higley Road.

Peter Fine, Banner Health president and chief executive, said the center is designed to triple in size to about 400,000 square feet in subsequent phases.

The outpatient care center will provide diagnosis, treatment, clinical trials, education and support services through its 300 doctors, nurses, clinicians and support staff. It is expected to open in fall 2011.

John Mendelsohn, a medical doctor and president of the Texas cancer center, told the audience that experts are testing a way to treat cancer differently, determining which genes and molecules are functioning abnormally and targeting them with new drugs.

"There's 800 new drugs in the pipeline from drug companies all over the world, and we have the largest program in the world making those experimental therapies available to patients," he said. "That's in Houston, and we want to transplant it here."

Mendelsohn praised Banner, saying the hospital places a high priority on new technologies and equipment and was one of the first to move to go completely electronic with its medical records.

Mendelsohn said the center is the product of two years of behind-the-scenes work and planning, and he's hopeful that it will be able to open before the target date.

Arizona House of Representatives Speaker Kirk Adams, R-Mesa, said the center is monumental because nearly 30,000 Arizona residents are projected to be diagnosed with cancer next year.

"The M.D. Anderson Banner Cancer Care Center cannot be built soon enough for these individuals," he said.

Adams said the center will support the growth of a health care-related niche along the Power Road and Phoenix-Mesa Gateway airport corridor.

He also spoke about a shift that's beginning to take place in Arizona's economy.

"The M.D. Anderson facility that will be built here is part of that shift, and it's a shift toward the desperately needed diversification of our economy, which is truly the only route to Arizona's future prosperity," Adams said.

Gilbert Mayor John Lewis said the center will be a regional draw in the United States.

"Even outside of that, this could be an international draw," he said.

Lewis said the nearly 70-year-old M.D. Anderson Cancer Care Center in Houston is known throughout the world.

"This is a big deal," he added.

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