

# New crime lab to speed up drug, alcohol testing

BY TODD LUCK  
THE CHRONICLE

A new local crime lab is hoping to cut down how long local authorities wait for test results from months or years, down to just days.

Integrated Forensic Laboratories (IFL) opened its new lab in the Alexander R. Beaty Public Safety Training and Support Center on Friday, May 29. The lab performs drug and blood alcohol tests for the Winston-Salem Police Department (WSPD). Currently law enforcement agencies around the state rely on the State Crime Lab for forensic testing and are experiencing long delays.

"With the State Crime Lab, there's a backlog of cases; we've had cases down there for several years that still haven't been tested," said Police Chief Barry Rountree. "This is a way we can improve our agency, improve our service delivery to the citizens of Winston-Salem and also improve the judicial process for individuals awaiting trial."

Rountree said that the wait time on testing causes major delays in criminal trials, extending jail time for some as they await for their day in court. In addition to drug and alcohol testing, the WSPD will also have the option to have tests involving things like DNA, toxicology and firearm forensics performed through IFL's network of labs.

The city has a five-year contract with IFL for \$108,000 a year. That cost is expected to be reduced by the amount of additional law enforcement agencies that contract the lab for services.

IFL operates and manages the lab, which the company installed itself. IFL also operates three labs in Texas, where it is headquartered. This month it opened a lab in Cumberland County, which will serve all of that county's law enforcement agencies.

IFL is accredited by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board, which is common for state, local and federal crime labs around the country.

In 2013, IFL was acquired by National Medical Services (NMS) Labs, a diagnostic and public safety clinical testing company whose main lab in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, has more than 200 employees and handles 600 crime lab cases a month. NMS Vice President of Operations Marlow Hicks, who was on hand at the opening, said there will be three employees working in the lab. He said turnaround on tests should be within five days.

"The lab is here to service the community. We want to provide a high quality service to support your judicial system and police agency," he said. "Fast, accurate turnaround time is important for the DA [district attorney] to prosecute their cases"

After the lab's ribbon cutting, law enforcement and city officials like Mayor Allen Joines and City Council



Photo by Todd Luck

(L-R) NMS Vice President of Operations Marlow Hicks, IFL Technical Leader Lori Knops, Mayor Allen Joines, City Council Members James Taylor and Jeff MacIntosh, City Manager Lee Garrity and WSPD Chief Barry Rountree cut the ribbon on the new crime lab.

Member James Taylor, who chairs the Public Safety Committee, were given tours of the lab. The public and media where not allowed inside, but a video of the inside was provided to the media by the City.

The high volume of cases sent to the State Crime Lab is only one cause for the state testing backlog. A 2009 U.S. Supreme Court decision requires state lab technicians to appear in court if the defense attorney requests it, on the principle that defendants must be able to confront their accusers. This has taken many lab techs away from testing.

Another issue is high attrition, as many lab techs leave for higher paying jobs, a problem state lawmakers hope is helped by the raises given in the budget recently passed by

the N.C. House of Representatives.

An IFL lab made headlines in Texas when an employee was fired in 2014 for mistakes in the documentation of samples, including incorrectly recording the names of 350 blood samples. The lab, which has been under contract since 2013 to analyze about 4,000 blood samples a year for Bexar County, conducted an audit on which cases where affected and disclosed the incident to the Texas Forensic Science Commission. In March, the San Antonio Express reported Bexar County DA Nico Lahood, who was newly elected last November, stopped sending samples to the lab for testing.

## Housing Authority of Winston-Salem receives award

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The Housing Authority of Winston-Salem will be honored with an Award of Merit by the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) during their upcoming summer conference in Austin, Texas.

The recently constructed Oaks At Tenth apartment community is being recognized for its innovation in new construction.

The Oaks At Tenth is the first affordable housing location of its kind in Winston-Salem. It is located at 795 Johnson Circle, near the intersection of Tenth Street and Cleveland Avenue (formerly known as Johnson Square).

The location is considered part of the first phase of the Cleveland Avenue Initiative plan, an effort to revitalize the surrounding 130 acre community as a mixed income, mixed-use neighborhood.

The Step Up housing initiative is designed to promote self-sufficiency and ultimately eliminate dependency on public assistance. The affordable housing location helps to bridge the gap between traditional public housing and market rate living.

A work requirement of 30 hours per week exists for all able-bodied adult residents. Tenants who are unable to maintain the work requirement will have the option of residing in more traditional, affordable housing locations managed by the Housing Authority.

As program participants become more economically stable, they will move upward and out in order to provide more opportunities for others waiting for a chance to achieve their dreams of home ownership.

The apartment complex features 50 units fully equipped with modern energy efficient appliances. One, two and three bedroom apartments are available with single level and multi level floor plans. The new community is convenient to the heart of downtown, restaurants, retail stores and cultural epicenter.

Housing Authority Chief Executive Officer, Larry C. Woods, extends his personal thanks to the Board of Commissioners, staff, and the residents of the East Ward community for their tireless support and participation in the Cleveland Avenue Neighborhood Transformation initiative.

"It is by your good works that this project has become another crown jewel in the City of Winston-Salem," Woods said. "This national award is a clear and positive indication that the community transformation is moving in the right direction."

Walter W. Pitt, of Bell, Davis and Pitt, currently serves as the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners for the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem, and said he was grateful for everyone involved with the project.

"I am proud of the diligence and efforts of the Housing Authority, our community partners and residents that helped make this step-up housing program successful," Pitt said. "This award is reflective of the level of quality and excellence we strive for in the revitalization of the Cleveland Avenue corridor. We will continue to collaborate with others to make a positive impact in Winston-Salem and beyond for many years to come."

**"It is by your good works that this project has become another crown jewel in the City of Winston Salem."**

— Larry C. Woods  
Chief Executive Officer, .

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