

High hopes for FMC's new Angelou Center

BY LAYLA GARDS
THE CHRONICLE

Forsyth Medical Center hopes its new Maya Angelou Center for Women's Health and Wellness will be a trail-blazing step forward in the battle for wellness.

Hospital officials announced Tuesday – in the midst of National Women's Health Week – plans to open the Center in June.

FMC President Jeff Lindsay called it a "landmark day" for the medical center, and pledged an ongoing commitment to revolutionizing women's healthcare. He also praised the Center's namesake, famed poet and author Dr. Maya Angelou, who made a rare appearance at the announcement.

"Our inspiration flows from a woman who transcends generations and whose words and ideas continue to resonate with women young and old all across the world," Lindsay said.

Hospital officials say the Center will be the region's first to coordinate comprehensive healthcare and wellness services specifically designed to meet the unique needs of women through every stage of life. It will employ patient navigators to connect women with information and preventative health services.

"We'll embrace our opportunity to reach, teach and inspire women not only in North Carolina and the US, but throughout the world," Lindsay said.

FMC Board of Trustees Chair Karen McNeil-Miller, president of the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, said the Center will be "a catalyst to continue the conversation about research for women's health, disparities in women's health and closing the gap."

Angelou says the Center will offer women something different.

"This is a revolutionary approach. This center means to offer developing ideas on women's health ... and to encourage women to become advocates in their own health," she stated. "The very idea of women volunteering to be their own advocates is exciting. I think we can find more help the more we seek it ourselves."

When asked to speak about her own healthcare experiences, Angelou related a painful story from her childhood. Angelou's grandmother was a store owner and had lent money to several white businessowners in an Arkansas town near the place where Angelou grew up. When she was eight years-old, Angelou developed an abscess and her grandmother took her to a white dentist whom the grandmother had once loaned money to.

"He said, 'I can't help her,'" Angelou related. "She said, 'But doctor, I helped you when you needed help.' He said, 'But Annie, I'll tell you the truth. I'd rather put my hand in a dog's mouth than a nigger's mouth.'"

Angelou said the experience colored her opinion of dentists well into her adult years.

"I thought my abscess would kill me until he said that," she remarked. "That hurt more."

She hopes the new facility that will bear her name will help to right some of the medical wrongs that local



Jeff Lindsay makes a presentation to Dr. Angelou.

residents may have suffered in the past.

"Every time a person is insulted, it leaves a scar on the person's soul, and each time a person is abetted and encouraged and helped, it helps to smooth that scar," she remarked. "That's what this center means to do, because all of us have scars."

This is not the first time Angelou has lent her name and support to worthy causes and programs. Winston-Salem State University's Maya Angelou Institute for the Improvement of Child and Family Education strives to improve child and family education, while Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center's Maya Angelou Center for Health Equity is working to end the many health disparities that exist between whites and minorities.

Also during the program, Lindsay dedicated the Maya Angelou Center for Women's Health and Wellness' forthcoming program, "Our Mothers, Ourselves," to Angelou's late mother, Vivian Baxter.

Alison Ashe-Card, an award winning attorney with Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice and member of the Women's Council of Forsyth Medical Center Foundation, said she isn't surprised that Forsyth Medical is launching such a bold effort.

"Novant's always been on the forefront, taking the lead in medicine and health for a long time. I think this is just another example of that," said Ashe-Card, whose husband is physician Dr. John Card.

City native Karen Russell, a registered nurse, was the first women's health patient navigator the hospital hired. Navigators serve as advocates for patients, helping them better understand diagnoses and treatments. FMC now utilizes roughly 20 patient navigators.

"It's been a wonderful experience," declared Russell, a Winston-Salem State University alumna. "Short of being away from home eight hours a day, it doesn't feel like work at all. It feels like what I was born to do."

Russell said she believes the patients truly appreciate the navigators' presence.

"When we go into a patient's room and introduce ourselves to them, a lot of times you see relief washing over them," she related. "We're like that rainbow in the clouds. We're offering them an opportunity to take care of themselves."



McNeil-Miller



Russell



Ashe-Card



Honorees pose with their certificates after Thursday's ceremony.

Photos by Todd Luck

Alumni

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Walmart, Subway, BB&T Ballpark and the studio of world-renowned glass artist Jon Kuhn.

Work kept several of the alumni away from last week's ceremony, but several dozen showed up to accept their certificates. They marched in graduation-style, taking their seats at the front of the auditorium. Monarch Employment Specialist Kevin Hiatt said each alumni had a long journey to success.

"Each person you just saw file in here was at some point dealt with a rough hand," he said. "Maybe they went through the complaining and self-pity and maybe they felt like giving up, but they didn't. They are all winners and today we honor them ... for their attitudes, their perseverance and their determination to succeed."

The honorees heard from Brad Zabel, director of development at Habitat for Humanity of Forsyth, who sang the praises of Monarch alumni Shereda Yeary, who schedules pick-ups of donated goods at Habitat's ReStore.

Monarch alumni Toni Gordon also spoke inspirational words. As a recovering addict with mental health issues, Gordon said she was reluctant to seek employment help. When she finally did, she said it changed her life. For the past two years, she has been a Monarch development special-



Honorees Lisa Kullify and Antonio Hampton.



ist, helping those with disabilities in Stokes County.

"I can tell you Monarch gave me that dream I needed, and I have succeeded in that dream," said Gordon. "It's gave me focus on my life. I have a purpose now."

Lisa Kullify was also in a low place in her life when she came to Monarch. A mood disorder and back problems had left her unemployed for two years. Monarch helped her try various

kinds of jobs, and she ended up finding an industry perfectly suited for her.

"I never did food service before, but I loved it," said Kullify. "I had passion; I had desire for it."

After graduating from Second Harvest Food Bank's Triad Community Kitchen, Kullify took a position with Aramark Food Services at Wake Forest University and has her statewide food preparation certificate. She dreams of someday combining her love of cooking and travel to start her own mobile kitchen com-

pany. Sporting a three piece suit at the ceremony, Monarch alum Antonio Hampton has had to overcome mental illness and an old criminal record in order to find employment.

He's now working for himself as co-owner of a brand new business, Melo Antonio Retail Shop, which sells clothing, incense, oils, t-shirts and more out of a tent near the corner of Martin Luther King Drive and New Walkertown Road.

"It feels great because you feel like you're independent, you can depend on yourself and that's how I prefer it," said Hampton.

Nakisha Beasley got the best seat in the house for the ceremony. Beasley, who uses a wheelchair, was up on stage for the entire ceremony to make it easier for her to receive her award. She was honored for the five years she has been employed at The Grand movie theater as a ticket taker.

"It was like graduating high school all over again," Beasley said of the ceremony and her honor.

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