Campus achievements abound in 2004

by Kristen Burbach, UNMC public affairs

UNMC continued to raise the bar in 2004 with historic levels of research funding, extraordinary academic partnerships and a significant campus construction plan.

Under the leadership of UNMC Chancellor Harold M. Maurer, M.D., and the contributions of dedicated faculty, staff and students, UNMC's impact stretched far and wide, including:

- Making the holidays merrier for children at Monroe Middle School, UNMC's Adopt-A-School;
- Educating Nebraskans through UNMC's free Mini-Medical School;
- Training and graduating hundreds of new health professionals;
- Revitalizing midtown Omaha through Destination Midtown;
- Advancing medical science and providing compassionate clinical care; and
- Reaching out to underserved patients in north and south Omaha, as well as around the world through medical mission trips and partnerships in Afghanistan and other international locations.

As we climb to even greater heights in 2005, we pause to reflect on some of the successes of 2004.

EDUCATION

In February, the UNMC College of Nursing received the University of Nebraska's most prestigious teaching award — the 2004 University-Wide Departmental Teaching Award. The award recognizes a department or unit within the university system that has made a unique and significant contribution to the teaching efforts of the university.

In September, UNMC announced the Virginia-Nebraska Alliance, a partnership with five Historically Black Colleges and Universities, a leading Virginia community college and Virginia Commonwealth University to provide a multitude of academic and research opportunities for minority undergraduate students and faculty.

Dr. Maurer is Midlander of the Year

by Tom O'Connor, UNMC public affairs

For being "the spark behind what may be the University of Nebraska Medical Center's most explosive period of growth and for his efforts to make UNMC a world-class academic medical center," UNMC Chancellor Harold M. Maurer, M.D., has been named "Midlander of the Year" for 2004 by The Omaha World-Herald.

In a special 12-page section in the Jan. 2 edition, the newspaper highlighted Dr. Maurer's accomplishments and featured five key faculty members who have been recruited or retained by the medical center during Dr. Maurer's tenure.

The featured faculty included: Ken Cowan, M.D., Ph.D., director of the UNMC Eppley Cancer Center; Howard Grodkiewicz, M.D., professor and chairman of the department of pharmacology; Alexander "Sasha" Kabanov, Ph.D., professor, College of Pharmacy; Dmitry Olesnykow, M.D., assistant professor, department of surgery; and Peggy Wheelock, Ph.D., professor, College of Dentistry.

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In August, Gov. Mike Johanns announced that Nebraska would begin an aggressive effort to develop a 10-state alliance to provide mutual aid in the event of an act of bioterrorism or other public health emergency. Gov. Johanns approved $200,000 of Nebraska's bioterrorism funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support the 10-state effort. UNMC committed an additional $50,000. The proposal includes establishing the Mid-America Demonstration Center for Public Health Preparedness at UNMC. The

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center would facilitate the establishment of the mutual aid agreements and develop a prototype for a public-health response system, based on Nebraska’s model.

RESEARCH

In July, UNMC announced that, in response to a request from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Stephen Rennard, M.D., Larson Professor of Pulmonary Medicine, had applied for a grant to study emphysema. If funded, the grant would use two of the human embryonic stem cell lines approved by President Bush.

In August, UNMC received its largest grant ever -- a five-year grant totaling almost $17 million -- from the NIH to further its goal of building a statewide biomedical research infrastructure among undergraduate and graduate institutions. UNMC’s James Turpen, Ph.D., is the principal investigator on the grant.

In December, a team of cardiovascular scientists -- led by Irving Zucker, Ph.D. -- received a five-year grant totaling more than $10 million from the NIH to study the mechanism for cardiovascular deterioration in heart failure. This is a renewal of a previous five-year grant. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, one of the institutes, that make up the NIH, awarded the program project grant.

FACILITIES

In July, University Medical Associates and its partners, The Nebraska Medical Center and UNMC, announced plans to develop a comprehensive, full-service medical campus on the southeast corner of 80th and Dodge Streets. The 36-acre campus will include a clinical cancer center, surgery facility, additional medical office buildings, and ultimately inpatient hospital beds. Planning of the first phase of the project -- the cancer center -- has already begun with completion expected in 2000.

In July, UNMC and the City of Omaha renamed 45th Street the Durham Research Plaza to reflect the major impact Chuck Durham and his late wife, Marge, have made on research, education and patient care.

In August, students began moving into the one- and two-bedroom apartments in UNMC’s new $4.8 million student apartment complex at 38th Avenue and Jackson Streets. The three-story complex, which consists of two brick buildings of 30 units each, is the first apartment building UNMC has built on its campus.

UNMC announced plans for the Research Center of Excellence II, a $74 million research tower that is similar in architectural design to the Durham Research Center. The Durham Foundation made an undisclosed donation to the 10-level, 242,000-square-foot building and the Nebraska Legislature approved a plan to appropriate $12 million in non-state general fund resources, contingent upon UNMC receiving $30 million in private support. Construction could begin in January 2006, with substantial completion tentatively scheduled for October 2007.

In October, the University of Nebraska Board of Regents approved a proposal allowing the Lincoln Division of the UNMC College of Nursing to move to the Commerce Court Building at 1230 O St. in Lincoln. The move would be temporary, completed in time for the 2005-06 school year, and would give the College of Nursing 24,779 square feet of space on three levels of the building. The Lincoln nursing program has been housed in Bostom and Fairfield Halls on the downtown UNL campus since 1976.

UNMC began fund-raising for the Center for Health Science Education, a new education facility planned for the northeast corner of 42nd and Emile Streets. The $52 million facility would become a “home” for the College of Medicine.

OUTREACH

In February, a UNMC contingent went to Kabul, Afghanistan to help improve the educational opportunities for health care providers in the war-torn country, as well as improve the status of women.

During a June trade mission, Gov. Mike Johanns announced education, research and patient care partnerships between UNMC, The Nebraska Medical Center and with Chinese institutions.

In August, the Health Resources and Services Administration, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, awarded UNMC a $1.13 million grant to create the Panhandle Area Health Education Center (AHEC) in Scottsbluff and provide continued support for the two Nebraska AHECs formed in 2001 and 2002.

In September, the UNMC College of Nursing and the Al-Zaytoonah Private University of Jordan, formalized an affiliation to advance nursing education in Jordan and the Arab region. The three-year contract includes sharing traditional and online nursing education and clinical curricula.

CLINICAL

In 2004, UNMC and its partner, The Nebraska Medical Center, reached a milestone shared by only five other transplant centers in the country by performing more than 2,000 liver transplants. The program started July 1, 1985.

Dr. Leland and Dorothy Olson of Omaha gifted $5 million to create the city’s first comprehensive outpatient center focused exclusively on women’s health. The gift will establish the Olson Women’s Outpatient Care Center as part of the Olson Center for Women’s Health. UNMC anticipates completion of the facility, to be located on the first floor of The Nebraska Medical Center’s Durham Outpatient Center, by the end of 2005.