FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Groundbreaking ceremony signals new era of medical education at UNMC

A new era of medical education is about to be launched at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

The launching will take place at 10:30 a.m., Tuesday, April 4, with a formal groundbreaking ceremony to celebrate the beginning of construction of a new education building on the UNMC campus. The building – the Michael F. Sorrell Center for Health Science Education – will serve as the gateway to the UNMC campus as well as home to the UNMC College of Medicine.

“This is a transforming moment in UNMC history,” said UNMC Chancellor Harold M. Maurer, M.D. “Our present educational facilities are terribly outdated. This building is a gift to our students and the state of Nebraska. It will provide state-of-the-art educational tools that will allow us to turn out the very best health professionals, who will serve Nebraskans for generations to come.”

The 134,183-square-foot center is located at the northeast corner of the intersection of 42nd Street and Emile Street, directly south of the UNMC College of Pharmacy. It is expected to be completed by the fall of 2008.

The building is being named in honor of Michael F. Sorrell, M.D., a legendary physician and administrator at UNMC for the past 35 years. Naming the building in honor of Dr. Sorrell was the idea of Omahans Ruth and Bill Scott, who will be recognized at the groundbreaking ceremony for making the largest donation to the University of Nebraska Foundation for the $52.7 million building.

Also being recognized at the groundbreaking ceremony will be the seven other founding benefactors who contributed to the project, which will be built completely through donations and without any state tax dollars. The other benefactors include Dr. Stanley and Dorothy Truhlsen, The Nebraska Medical Center, The Lozier Foundation, UNMC Physicians, the Dr. C.C. and Mabel L. Criss Memorial Foundation, the UNMC College of Medicine Alumni Association and James Linder, M.D., associate vice chancellor for research at UNMC.

More than 670 alumni of the UNMC College of Medicine contributed toward the new building. “I was thrilled with the response of our College of Medicine alumni in their generous contributions toward this building,” said John Gollan, M.D., Ph.D., dean of the UNMC College of Medicine. “I think it’s the ultimate compliment to the College of Medicine and the outstanding education which it provided to these physicians. This facility is truly going to make a difference. It will change the face of medical education in Nebraska.”

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Dr. Gollan is especially pleased that the Sorrell Center will serve as home to the College of Medicine. "We are the only UNMC college that has never had its own building. Our educational components have been scattered across the campus," he said. "To pull all these elements together in one facility is a dream come true for our students and faculty. Best of all, it will allow us to deliver an outstanding 21st century educational experience to our students."

In essence, Dr. Gollan said the groundbreaking ceremony will serve as the College of Medicine's kickoff event for its 125th anniversary, which will be celebrated throughout 2006 with several special events.

He said the Sorrell Center will replace obsolete and inadequate educational facilities with a building that features the very latest in technology, including:

- wireless technology throughout;
- smart classrooms featuring interactive technology;
- a clinical skills center where students can learn communications skills and practice clinical decision-making in a safe, simulated environment;
- innovative technology and teaching laboratories equipped with virtual microscopy and a flexible design that enables students to interact with the latest most advanced technology;
- small group instruction rooms that can support problem-based learning;
- small and large amphitheaters;
- a large interactive space featuring student lounges, study areas and other student-oriented amenities;
- a campus events center which will provide a setting for campus, alumni and community events and create an environment for the lifelong learning so critical for today's health professionals;
- beautifully landscaped green space around the facility where student and campus interactions can take place.

When completed, the four-story building will give a new look to 42nd Street, which has been the primary gateway to the campus, Dr. Maurer said. "The Sorrell Center will be a beautiful addition to Midtown Omaha," he said. "We hope it will spark even more interest in people and businesses wanting to be a part of the Midtown area."

In addition to Drs. Maurer and Gollan and Ruth Scott, other speakers at the groundbreaking ceremony will include: Jim McClurg, Ph.D., chairman, University of Nebraska Board of Regents; James B. Milliken, president, University of Nebraska; Terry Fairfield, CEO, University of Nebraska Foundation; Glenn Fosdick, president and CEO, The Nebraska Medical Center; Rodney Markin, M.D., Ph.D., president and CEO, UNMC Physicians, and senior associate dean, UNMC College of Medicine; Dan Connealy, president, UNMC Student Senate, and UNMC Student Regent; Dennis Strauss, M.D., president, UNMC College of Medicine Alumni Association; Gail Walling Yanney, M.D., a 1961 graduate of the UNMC College of Medicine; and Debra Romberger, M.D., professor, UNMC Department of Internal Medicine.

The groundbreaking ceremony will be held under a large 40 ft. x 80 ft. tent. A limestone panel containing the names of the eight founding benefactors will be revealed during the ceremony and will later be placed inside the Sorrell Center. In addition, the founding benefactors, speakers and other dignitaries in attendance will be asked to break ground with ceremonial gold shovels.

UNMC is the only public health science center in the state. Its educational programs are responsible for training more health professionals practicing in Nebraska than any other institution. Through its commitment to education, research, patient care and outreach, UNMC has established itself as one of the country's leading centers in cancer, transplantation biology, bioterrorism preparedness, neurodegenerative diseases, cardiovascular diseases, genetics, biomedical technology, ophthalmology and arthritis. UNMC's research funding from external sources is now more than $72 million annually and has resulted in the creation of nearly 2,400 highly skilled jobs in the state.