

'A huge step forward': New \$24 million detox, recovery center fills gaps across Cape Fear

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After two years of construction, The Healing Place of New Hanover County is set to open its doors at the beginning of next month.

The facility, which plans to offer peer-led residential drug and alcohol recovery, will be the first of its kind in Southeastern North Carolina. The recovery center aims to fill a treatment gap within the community, providing 200 beds for both men and women struggling with addiction.

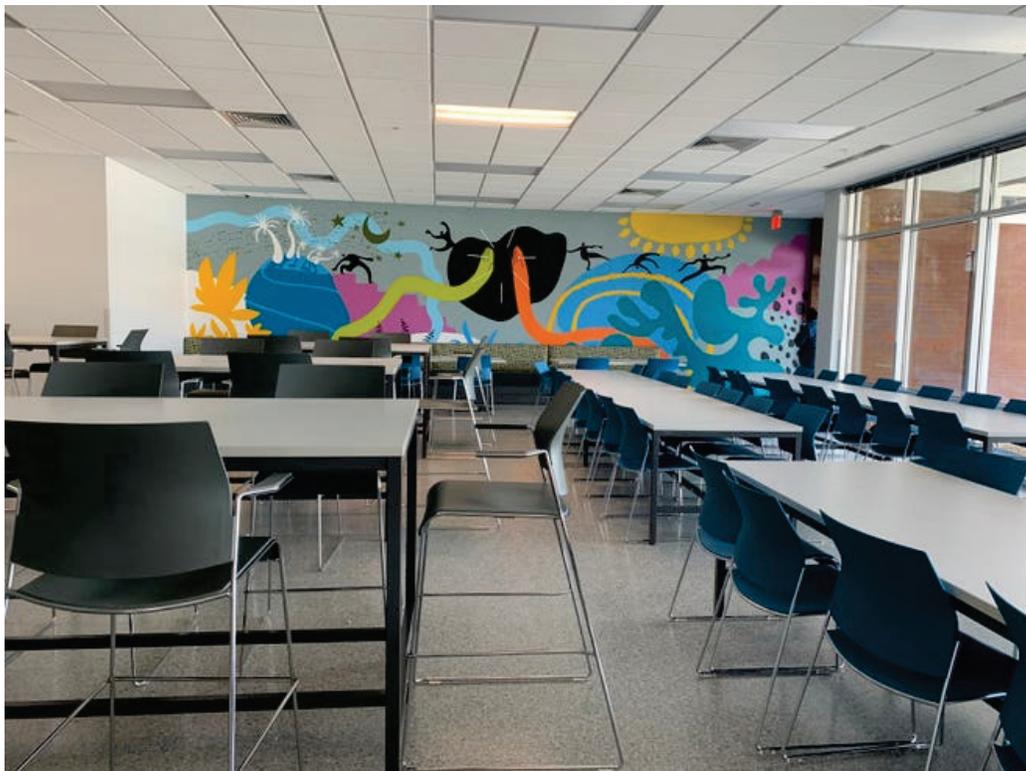
New Hanover County and Wilmington leaders gathered Tuesday inside the facility's light-filled administrative building to hold a ribbon-cutting and recognize the leaders who helped make the facility a reality.

"This is a terrific day for New Hanover County, but even beyond that for our entire region," said Rob Zapple, a member of the county's board of commissioners. "It's been a long-haul getting here."



Work on the facility began about eight years ago, when local health services provider Trillium Health Resources first proposed a new treatment model that would address alcohol and opioid abuse in the area. The next year, in 2016, a report identified Wilmington as a top city for opioid abuse nationwide.

In the years that followed, New Hanover County identified reducing opioid abuse as one of its key priorities and partnered with Trillium to secure a nearly 9-acre piece of land at 1000 Medical Center Drive in Wilmington, a site near New Hanover Regional Medical Center, for the facility. They began to develop plans for the center, including 100 facility beds for men. Later, county leaders also added 100 beds for women.



In 2020, Trillium selected The Healing Place of Louisville, Ky. to operate the new center – a move that proved controversial for some local leaders who initially believed the facility would be operated by local provider Coastal Horizons. Some have also questioned the Healing Place’s reliance on abstinence-based treatment instead of medication-assisted treatment.

Construction on the facility began in 2021 and was initially set to wrap up in the fall. However, that timeline shifted as builders faced delays related to COVID-19 and supply chain issues, said Dickie Thompson, executive vice president of J.M. Thompson, the project’s contractor.

Now, the facility is receiving its final touches and is set to open on Feb. 1, according to Brian Mingia, executive director of The Healing Place of New Hanover County.



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The Healing Place employees led tours of the newly finished facility on Tuesday, showing off the communal and peer-led nature of the program that will take place on the grounds.

People who come to The Healing Place of New Hanover County with an addiction will typically start in the facility’s detox building where patients will be given a bed in a communal space and a locker. It’s there where clients will be introduced to the program, have a clinical assessment and start planning their next steps, said Maurice Ludwick, director of special projects with The Healing Place of Louisville, Kentucky.



If the individuals show interest in the long-term recovery program, they will go into the facility's motivational track program. In the motivational track, participants are expected to go to classes each day and follow a strict and structured schedule.

"Their level of participation in the program is what propels them through," Ludwick said. "They start to see the progress that comes from their effort, and they start to see that they are in some control of what is in front of them."

Once participants complete the motivational track, they move to the recovery phase of the facility, which gives them more privacy and freedom while still ensuring they attend necessary peer-led meetings and go to their assigned jobs, Ludwick said. The facility will also offer approximately seven beds for people needing emergency overnight shelter.



The construction of The Healing Place of New Hanover County is one of the county's capital projects and is set to be funded through loan proceeds along with part of the county's contributions to Trillium. The budget for the facility's construction totals more than \$24 million.

New Hanover County owns and will be responsible for maintaining the facility's buildings, but The Healing Place of Louisville, Ky. will fully manage and operate the treatment center. New Hanover County has also committed to funding 50 facility beds each year, including 25 men's beds and 25 women's beds. The county's board of commissioners formally approved the lease for the facility last week.



In addressing the local leaders gathered on Tuesday, New Hanover County Manager Chris Coudriet emphasized the impact the facility would have on individuals and families struggling with addiction in the Wilmington area.

"I've heard the stories and know this is a huge step forward for New Hanover County in providing one of many resources that our community desperately needs to manage and live through and forward with the disease of addiction," he said.

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