

## Wellmont Health System unveils Cancer Treatment Center in Bristol

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BRISTOL, VA. -- A group of local health-care providers received praise and emotional testimonials Thursday during a ribbon-cutting ceremony for their new treatment facility.

About 50 people attended the unveiling of Wellmont Health System's new 13,800-square-foot facility on Island Road near Interstate 81's Exit 1. The center will provide offices and clinical services for four physicians and a nurse practitioner who currently see patients at a facility on Medical Park Boulevard in Bristol, Tennessee. It will also supplement infusion services at nearby Bristol Regional Medical Center and in Norton, Virginia.

"It is a huge pleasure to have such a gorgeous facility in bricks and mortar and to have all the different assets and services available here," Wellmont interim CEO Bart Hove said. "We are very blessed because the building is the envelope, but the people who are inside — the physicians, nurses, staff members and leaders that make the organization run as smoothly as it does — are focused on patient care and that is what drives our organization."

Among the speakers during Thursday's ceremony was Barry Harley, who was initially diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in 2011 and was treated by Wellmont oncologist Dr. Perrie Ryan.

"When you first hear the word cancer it scares everyone. When we came in to talk to Dr. Ryan and see what we were going to do, the threat and the pain just eased. I have never met a group of people like this," Harley said. "This is the greatest God-given group of people I've ever been in contact with. They are a blessing from God and I have been cancer-free for eight months now."

In addition to thanking Wellmont officials for the new facility, Bristol Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Joy Madison offered a tribute for her care during a two-year battle with metastatic breast cancer. She praised Dr. Alton Blow and all the staff she regularly sees during visits.

"He showed up with a combat plan and he and his team have been coordinating and implementing that plan ever since," Madison said. "Dr. Blow not only delivers the care, but outsources me for what I need, when I need it."

Ryan said he and the staff appreciate the new center.

"An oncology practice is most effective, most efficient when the providers and infusion suite are in the same building. We are all excited to see this realization," Ryan said, adding that they look forward to begin treating patients there Monday.

The center includes 10 examination rooms, 12 infusion bays and will offer oncology, hematology, genetic counseling, clinical trials and nutrition services.

“This center has been more than two years in planning. It has taken a long time and been a long journey,” said Sue Lindenbusch, senior vice president of Wellmont Cancer Institute. “This has truly been a collaboration of many, many people.”

Wellmont also operates stand-alone cancer centers in Johnson City, Kingsport and Norton. The new center was built in Virginia to help qualify for a federal program allowing the purchase of expensive chemotherapy drugs at reduced prices.

“This location was very intentional because we still want to be able to serve Tennessee residents and Virginia residents. But because it is a sister site to our Southwest Virginia Cancer Center, it is 340B eligible,” Lindenbusch said. “That means you serve a high percentage of patients who have Medicaid, Medicare and are uninsured. As long as you continue to treat those vulnerable patient populations, and you meet a certain percentile, you can participate. That is what makes it possible for us to treat all patients regardless of insurance status or if they lose their insurance.”