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HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER

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Celebrating Collaboration — TTUHSC and City of Abilene Unveil New Julia Jones Matthews School of Population and Public Health

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) and members of the Abilene community today (June 29) celebrated the official unveiling the new Julia Jones Matthews School of Population and Public Health.

The school, which is the sixth at the university, officially opened May 24 and aims to train future health care leaders in population and public health – a sector of health care that has been elevated in public awareness and prominence by the COVID-19 pandemic.

TTUHSC President Lori Rice-Spearman, Ph.D., said the school would not have come to fruition without the vision and tireless efforts of the Abilene community.

“There is no higher compliment than what we’ve experienced here in Abilene. For a community to reach out and ask us to join them in impacting health care is truly an honor,” Rice-Spearman said. “Our goal with the Julia Jones Matthews School of Population and Public Health is to leverage that support to transform health care for this community and develop models that will serve other communities throughout the state.”

Original funding for the school included a \$25 million commitment from Hendrick Medical Center, with the support of the Abilene community including the Dodge Jones Foundation and the Dian Graves Owen Foundation. This included the development and construction of a building to house the school as well as funds to support operations. Joseph E. Canon, executive vice president and director of the Matthews Family Office and former Dodge Jones Foundation executive director, said the foundation was looking to support a project that would have a significant, lasting impact on Abilene.

“When Dr. Mitchell (Tedd L. Mitchell, M.D., Texas Tech University System chancellor and former TTUHSC president) broached the idea of this project, Mrs. Matthews quickly realized this was another major investment in a health sciences program which would have a lasting impact, in the spirit of the two existing TTUHSC schools in Abilene,”

Canon said. “She was convinced this was the way to go. We know she would still feel that way; in fact, we are more convinced than ever.”

The school is named in honor of Julia Jones Matthews, a longtime supporter of the Abilene community and the university. In 2017, TTUHSC officially named the Department of Public Health in honor of Matthews and carried that namesake to the school. Matthews passed away Nov. 17, 2016, leaving a legacy of philanthropy throughout the Abilene community.

The Julia Jones Matthews School of Population and Public Health officially resides on the TTUHSC Abilene campus, and offers students and researchers a collaborative educational experience, emphasizing research and use of large data sets to understand needs in health care delivery.

“We believe the formation of the Julia Jones Matthews School of Population and Public Health is a signature moment in our journey to expand interprofessional education opportunities for students across the university in all disciplines, and all schools” said TTUHSC Provost and Chief Academic Officer Darrin D’Agostino, D.O., MPH. “We intend to remain steadfast in improving the health of all communities that TTUHSC serves by training innovative and collaborative health professionals who focus on health and wellness. This school, and establishing Abilene as its administrative home, is yet another important step in that mission.”

TTUHSC Acting Dean Billy Philips, Ph.D., MPH, said Abilene is a true example of how a community can come together to provide better health care and health care education for the people of West Texas.

“I never had the opportunity to meet Julia Jones Matthews, but one can hardly drive around Abilene without seeing her profound influence on the good things in this community,” Philips said. “This school, which bears her name, is another good thing. It reflects her vision and commitment to Abilene’s leadership role here in the Heart of Texas. Those who graduate from here will bring good to people in places that need the services we can provide. So, if I could say anything to her at this moment it would be to thank her for the opportunity to continue her legacy.”

The nationally-recognized TTUHSC Master of Public Health (MPH) program, which recently was ranked among the nation’s top-100 by the U.S. News & World Report’s 2023 Best Graduate School Rankings, will offer related dual- and joint-degree programs and a graduate certificate in public health. The current joint-degree offerings include M.D./MPH, MPA/MPH and a Pharm.D./MPH.