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WEST-GREENVILLE HEALTH CLINIC OFFICIALLY OPENS IN JOY COMMUNITY CENTER

Greenville – The Dr. Irons HealthAssist Clinic officially opened its doors at JOY Community Center today, with Dr. Thomas Irons himself brandishing the golden scissors to cut the ceremonial ribbon.

A longtime community-health advocate and the chief medical officer for nonprofit ECU Health affiliate Access East, Irons is also retired from a celebrated career as an ECU Brody School of Medicine professor and pediatric physician. He is a recent recipient of the Order of the Longleaf Pine, the state's highest civilian honor, for his tireless work on behalf of others.

"Dr. Irons has done more for community health in eastern North Carolina than possibly anyone else in the history of our medically underserved region," noted Shantell Cheek, director of the Access East HealthAssist Uninsured Network, which operates and manages the clinic.

"It is only right this important community resource be named in his honor, and that he himself did the honors of officially opening its doors!"

The Dr. Irons HealthAssist Clinic, also known as the Pitt County Care Clinic at JOY, operates out of the same building as the busy JOY Soup Kitchen, which feeds an estimated 400 people a day. The clinic has actually been seeing patients in different capacities for more than a year, providing such wraparound health services as medication assistance, patient education and linking to local resources.

The clinic has also regularly hosted outreach events by HealthAssist community partners like PiCASO (the Pitt County AIDS Service Organization) and the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina.

With its two standard exam rooms, the clinic will provide free health-care services to the uninsured, to include treatment of acute non-emergency issues (colds, bug bites, rashes, etc.) as well as assisting with chronic-disease management for such pervasive conditions as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Some lab analysis will also be available, including for A1C blood-sugar levels and cholesterol, while in-home tests will be available for COVID diagnosis.

Uninsured patients from Beaufort, Greene, Edgecombe, Hertford, Martin or Pitt counties who need more comprehensive health services will have the option to enroll in the no-cost HealthAssist program, for help coordinating their medical care.

The Dr. Irons HealthAssist Clinic at JOY is open from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. weekdays; "We serve the lunch crowd during the week," Cheek said. Michelle Brathwaite, a Duke University-trained nurse practitioner, has recently begun seeing patients during Wednesday hours, with Irons serving as her advisor. Second-year ECU medical student Chris Lovick is assisting them.

It was a demanding three years of work to get the clinic up and running, Irons noted after the short opening ceremony. "We had a lot of struggles," he commented. "At times I didn't know if it was ever going to work out!"

JOY Community Center & Soup Kitchen is at 700 Albemarle Ave. in West Greenville.



Dr. Thomas Irons, above, in characteristic bowtie, cutting the ribbon in front of the West Greenville clinic named in his honor, accompanied by Nurse Practitioner Michelle Brathwaite, left, and HealthAssist Community Health Worker Gerri Ashe.

Immediately below, Irons with staff in 2017 at Greenville's James D. Bernstein Community Health Center, which he was instrumental in founding, and where he was then medical director.

