Creighton University plans to build a $150 million medical school at Park Central Mall next to St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center in Phoenix.

Plans call for training 700 medical students in what will be two buildings totaling 300,000 square feet on the southeast corner of the mall property at Central Avenue and Catalina Drive.

Phase I will be a 150,000-square-foot building that will cost between $75 million and $100 million to develop, followed by a mirror image of a second 150,000-square-foot building at a later time as the school grows.

“Creighton University has strong connections to the Arizona medical community, and we look forward to expanding our impact by educating many more exceptionally qualified health care professionals to serve the community moving forward,” said the Rev. Daniel S. Hendrickson, president of Creighton University.

Creighton expects to break ground in spring 2019, said Dale Davenport, senior associate dean for Creighton University School of Medicine. He said the Phoenix campus is expected to welcome students beginning in July 2021.

Phase I of the project will include the construction of a 2,000-space parking structure that will cost $25 million to build and will be funded by bonds, said Christine Mackay, economic development director for the city of Phoenix.

Creighton University Medical School has been growing its presence in partnership with Dignity Health’s St. Joseph’s Hospital and Medical Center for more than a decade. Creighton’s third- and fourth-year medical students do clinical rotations at the Phoenix hospital.

By 2016, the Jesuit Catholic medical school — based in Omaha, Nebraska — signed an affiliation agreement with Maricopa Integrated Health System and Dignity Health. That relationship solidified further when the three organizations created the Creighton University-Arizona Health Education Alliance to oversee graduate
medical education programs for MIHS and St. Joseph's, as well as the program for District Medical Group, the physician partnership that works at MIHS.

Now 325 graduate medical education residents are under the alliance's umbrella, with 204 residents coming from MIHS and 111 from St. Joseph's. The goal is to have 700 to 800 students on campus. Creighton currently has 100 medical students in Phoenix.

"This will be a full-blown expansion of their medical school," Mackay said.

Phoenix Mayor Thelda Williams, who moved to Phoenix from Omaha in 1971 when her husband was transferred to J.C. Penney's at Park Central Mall, said she is thrilled to see Creighton expand its presence in Phoenix.

"I have known Creighton forever," she said. "And I know the quality we're getting is just outstanding. It will be such a great addition to our medical services here as well as all the educational opportunities."

Creighton has an outstanding reputation, Williams said.

"They have a long history of providing quality services," she said. "Anybody in the Midwest knows that. Now everybody in the Southwest will know."

Phoenix Councilwoman Laura Pastor, who represents midtown Phoenix, said Creighton's presence will help to revitalize the area.

"Right now, Phoenix midtown is undergoing a significant renaissance," she said. "This helps our city."

Midtown Phoenix has been filling with new residents, corporate headquarters and tech companies since 2012, she said.

Banner Health moved its corporate headquarters to midtown Phoenix in 2015, and Dignity Health's regional offices are next to St. Joseph's — all around Central Avenue and Thomas Road.

That midtown growth and the surrounding amenities were key to Creighton's decision to locate in the area, Davenport said.

"When we look at what's happening in the midtown area we thought we could be a part of that growth," he said.

Peoria-based Plaza Cos. and Tucson-based Holualoa Cos. are in the midst of a $57 million renovation of Park Central Mall. It will have about 1.4 million square feet, with about 540,000 square feet of office space, 340,000 square feet dedicated to medical space and a 200-unit residential structure and possibly a hotel in the future, Mackay said.

Plaza and Holualoa will build the project for Creighton, which will buy the 6 acres from the two companies. They are in escrow to buy the parking lots at Park Central Mall from Jerry Moyes, founder of Swift Transportation who retired as CEO in 2016, Mackay said. That deal is expected to close in October.

**Area home to 4 med schools**

Mackay first heard about Creighton's interest in building a Phoenix medical school in May 2017, when Greater Phoenix Economic Council President and CEO Chris Camacho called her to introduce her to "Project Integrate," the code name for Creighton's search for 6 acres.
Creighton was looking for a 6-acre parcel in an urban setting close to light rail, she said.

Her first thought was Park Central Mall, considering she had compiled research on the property when Amazon.com was looking for space for its second headquarters last year.

"Chris and her team did an extraordinary job mapping out different options, problem solving through complex development needs," Camacho said. "I expect to see this new campus be a new urban innovation hub."

GPEC worked with the Phoenix City Council to create a Community Facilities District to sell bonds to build the 2,000-space parking garage. Within 25 years, the garage will be owned by the city, which could operate it as a public parking structure to make its money back, Mackay said.

The Phoenix area is already home to four medical schools. The University of Arizona College of Medicine-Phoenix, has 325 medical students on the Phoenix Biomedical Campus in downtown Phoenix. Mayo Medical School has 100 medical students in Scottsdale. Midwestern University's Arizona College of Osteopathic Medicine in Glendale has 1,009 med students, while A.T. Still University has 100 medical students in Mesa.

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