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Golisano donates \$50 million to URM

Money will establish medical center institute

Justin Murphy

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

Billionaire philanthropist Tom Golisano is donating \$50 million to the University of Rochester Medical Center to establish the Golisano Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Institute, he announced Thursday. It is the largest single gift UR has ever received and the largest that Golisano, an Irondequoit native, has ever made. "This gift will change the University of Rochester, our Medical Center, and our community forever," UR Board of Trustees Chairman Richard Handler said in a statement.

Golisano and university leaders spent nearly a decade planning the new institute, which will gather URM's various programs and services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) into a single location. The precise location has not been determined and URM did not get an expected opening date.

UR has already invested \$80 million in its current IDD program in the last nine years, in part to demonstrate its suitability for Golisano's additional largesse.

"We've built up a pretty spectacular operation here," said John Foxe, the director of URM's Del Monte Institute for Neuroscience. He was announced Thursday as the director of the IDD institute.

In an interview earlier this week, Foxe said the new institute would immediately be the most advanced and

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well-integrated IDD center in the nation.

"What we're proposing to do here goes way above and beyond what's ever been done anywhere else," he said.

"For a relatively small town in western New York, we're punching far above our weight."

\$150 million over years for IDD

Golisano was already a major benefactor to URM. He donated \$14 million to build the Golisano Children's Hospital in 2002, then another \$20 million for a new building a decade later.

Care for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities has been the central focus of the Paychex founder's extensive philanthropy.

He now has given nearly \$150 million to IDD charities and institutions, according to the Golisano Foundation, which he established in 1985.

Golisano's newly announced gift follows a pattern he established on a smaller scale in 2019, when he and his foundation gave \$3 million to open the Golisano Autism Center.

It provided a single building for families to access services that previously had been spread across several different locations.

Golisano Foundation Executive Director Anne Costello announced it as "the first-ever central location in our region where people with autism and their families may access comprehensive, coordinated services from multiple providers all under one roof."

Now, URM officials are saying the same thing about the new IDD institute. From a patient perspective, Foxe said, it will be much easier to get all kinds of health care, from IDD-specific needs to dental and general care.

"For a neurotypical person, you know how difficult it can be to (coordinate) different appointments in different fields," he said.

"How to get there, where to park, where the room is, check in at the reception — that's everyday stuff for most of us, and it's not trivial. You can imagine what it's like for a person with an IDD."

'A bit of a gingerbread house'

The medical center is already one of the few recognized leaders in the country with a wide array of clinical and research programs for autism, cerebral palsy and other IDD.

Much of that work is done at the pediatric complex care center, but other aspects are spread across campus or beyond.

It's "a bit of a gingerbread house," as Foxe put it — and typical situation for a medical center.

"You might have built a little bit of an autism center and then a clinic for cerebral palsy ... and it grew up over the decades, and you get to a point where you're trying to pull them all together and it's not so easy to do," he said.

"Without Tom and his generosity, we'd be doing what everyone else is doing, which is kind of trying to patch it together."

Much of the money will go toward the new building. Some will pay for specialized equipment — for example, magnetic resonance imaging machines built specifically for people with IDD.

Some will go toward hiring more doctors. URM already has added 40 new faculty since 2016, Foxe said, and has amplified its training programs.

"Because of (Golisano), URM can increase our clinical services and access to care — an enormous need in our region — and become the global leader in IDD medical evaluations and diagnoses, the training of IDD professionals, and advocacy, assistance, and consultation programs for the lasting benefit of those with IDD," URM CEO David Linehan said in a statement.

Community need for URM care

URM cares for about 20,000 people with IDD each year — a reflection of the prevalence of the various conditions included under that term, but also of the way Rochester has become a nationally recognized center for IDD, for clinicians but also for families seeking care for their children.

That is due in part to a long history of collaboration among hospitals, community support agencies and parents.

Golisano's first wife, Gloria Austin, was the first director of the Coordinating Group on Mental Retardation in Monroe County, an effort in the mid-1970s to coordinate care for what is now known as IDD. Austin, who served as a trustee for the Golisano Foundation in its early days, died in April at age 82.

In 2004, Monroe County parents formed the organization AutismUp as a sort of mutual support network. decades much more than that. realized get together programs communi-ty," Executive Director

now headquartered Community Rochester, care providers, people remain 2023 study disabilities dissatisfied with their health care experience.

In the last two decades it has grown to bemuch more than that.

"We realized that, as a group of moms, we could not (only) get together and support each other, but that we really had the power to develop programs that didn't exist in the community," Executive Director Sarah Milko said in 2018.

AutismUp is now headquartered at the Golisano Autism Center, less than a mile fromURM. The AI Sigl Community of Agencies and CP Rochester, two leading IDD care providers, are also there.

Nationally, barriersto care for people with IDD remain in place. A 2023 study showed people with cognitive disabilities were more likely to report beingdissatisfied with their health care experi In particular, they reported that doctors did not spend enough time with them, did not listen to them closely or treat them with respect, and did not communicatein a way theycould understand. Those are all problems that Golisano's new institute will be designedto address. "His transformative generosity will propel our strengths, deepen our commitment to IDD, and truly change lives around the world," UR President Sarah Mangelsdorf saidin a statement.

"There is no question that those with IDD will have a better, brighter future becauseof Tom Golisano." enee.

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veteran Justin Murphy is a veteran reporter at the Democrat and Chronicle andauthor of "Your Children Are Very Greatly in Danger: School Segregationin Rochester, New York." Follow him on Twitter at twitter.com/CitizenMurphy or contact him at jmurphy7@gannett.com.

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UR Board of Trustees chairman