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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Harris County Opens New, State-of-the-Art Building for the
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences**

Ribbon cut on the new home for the county's Medical Examiner and Crime Laboratory

HOUSTON, Texas (March 16, 2017) – The [Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences](http://www.hctx.net/ifs) (HCIFS) today cut the ribbon symbolically opening its new, state-of-the-art building constructed on a 3.2-acre site in the Texas Medical Center. Funded by a voter-approved bond in November 2007, construction of the new facility began in July 2014. HCIFS began full operations in the new building on Monday, March 6, 2017.

“The County Commissioners have provided true leadership through their support of the planning, funding and construction of this facility,” said Luis A. Sanchez, M.D., HCIFS executive director and chief medical examiner. “This facility will serve as a national model and will ensure that Harris County is second to none in the realm of forensic science.”

The 210,000 square foot, nine-story tower, totaling \$75,000,000 in project cost, is equipped with state-of-the-art technology as well as integrated clinical, laboratory, administrative, public and teaching/training areas.

The new facility features:

- Designed space for the following forensic expertise: pathology; investigation; anthropology; neuropathology; entomology; emergency management; morgue services; histology; toxicology; drug chemistry; trace evidence analysis, including fire debris, gunshot residue and paint analysis; firearms; quality management; evidence handling; imaging, design and photography; administrative and operational support services
- Dedicated consultation rooms throughout the facility for hosting private meetings with families, attorneys and law enforcement as well as specially equipped conference rooms to facilitate multidisciplinary consultation and collaboration
- A multipurpose training room for hands-on teaching
- An ADA-compliant auditorium, with seating for more than 200, for academic endeavors

Established in 1957 as the first Medical Examiner system in the state of Texas, HCIFS marks its 60th year serving both the citizens and justice system of Harris County.

“In our 60-year history it’s important to recognize that the role of the medical examiner has expanded,” said Dwayne A. Wolf, M.D., Ph.D., HCIFS deputy chief medical examiner. “Never has there been a more pressing need for mortality surveillance, to identify trends in violent deaths, to identify trends in drug-related deaths, and to be vigilant for emerging infectious diseases.

Likewise, there has never been a more pressing need to apply scientific rigor to death investigation, or to incorporate expertise from other disciplines into our specialty. This facility was designed to provide a place to optimize all those activities, while continuing to excel at our core responsibilities,” Wolf continued.

The HCIFS crime laboratory began to take shape in 1986 when the medical examiner's office established a laboratory to analyze confiscated pills, powders and leafy substance to identify controlled substances.

"Today, as we dedicate our new home, the Institute has proven the value of the integration of the crime laboratory service with the medical examiner service," said Roger Kahn, Ph.D., Crime Laboratory director. "With all forensic disciplines in one location, we promote a collaborative environment, both internally and within the Texas Medical Center that fosters innovation, and encourages the development of new techniques and the improvement of existing ones. The citizens of Harris County can be confident that the Institute's Crime Laboratory is a leader among crime laboratories nationwide."

The construction of the HCIFS building also serves as an example of collaboration between Page (architecture & engineering), Crime Lab Design, Vaughn Construction and the Harris County Engineering Department as well as the inclusion of the HCIFS staff in creating highly functional work and laboratory areas.

"Today we make a solemn pledge to all Harris County that we will deliver on the monumental promise of this center," added Sanchez. "We pledge to you that in this state-of-the-art facility science will be the devoted servant of justice."

About the Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences:

The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences, an independent, science-based organization, provides two distinct forensic services for the Harris County community – the Medical Examiner Service and the Crime Laboratory Service. The Institute is a member institution of the Texas Medical Center® and is accredited by the National Association of Medical Examiners, the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board-*International*, the American Board of Forensic Toxicology, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, the Texas Department of Public Safety, and the Texas Medical Association for the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education. To learn more, visit: www.harriscountytexas.gov/ifs.

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PHOTOS/CUTLINES:

To obtain high-resolution images, contact Tricia Bentley, PIO at PIO@ifs.hctx.net or 713-927-5702

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Cutline:

Officials from Harris County, the Texas Medical Center and construction/design teams cut the ribbon on the new, state-of-the-art building for the Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences.

Pictured (left to right): Michael Vaugh, Vaughn Construction; Jeff Bricker, Page; Vince Ryan, Harris County Attorney; William McKeon, Texas Medical Center; Richard E. Wainerdi, Ph.D., retired Texas Medical Center; John Blount, P.E., Harris County Engineering Department; Harris County Judge Ed Emmett; Luis A. Sanchez, M.D., Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences; Dwayne A. Wolf, M.D., Ph.D., Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences; Roger Kahn, Ph.D., Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences; David Kester, Harris County Budget Management; Mary Daniels, Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences; and Bruce High, Harris County Central Technology Services.

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Cutline: Harris County Judge Ed Emmet dedicates the new Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences building into public service at the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony on Thursday, March 16, 2017.

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Cutline: Luis A. Sanchez, M.D., and Harris County Judge Ed Emmet at the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for the Harris County Institute of Forensic Science on Thursday, March 16, 2017