



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WNC Colorectal Cancer Screening Initiative Awarded National Honor from American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy

Asheville, NC – The Western North Carolina Colorectal Cancer Screening Initiative (WNC CRCSI), housed within the Western Carolina Medical Society (WCMS), has been selected as a 2027 American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE) HANDS Distinguished Impact Award recipient. The HANDS Award for Distinguished Impact recognizes individuals and organizations whose work is creating lasting change in the field of digestive health.

WNC CRCSI was founded by Dr. Michael Newcomer of Digestive Health Partners, who continues to serve as its medical director. Upon news of receiving this esteemed honor, Dr. Newcomer shared, "I am incredibly grateful to all the individuals who invest their time and talents to ensure that uninsured patients in western North Carolina have access to colorectal cancer screening. We are seeing an increase in positive screening tests, indicating a high impact on the population being screened. This has included both early cancer detection and countless cancers prevented with the removal of advanced colon polyps. By providing no-cost screening access for low-income, uninsured patients, we have been able to decrease the burden of colon cancer in our region. I am honored to accept the ASGE HANDS award on behalf of the WNC CRCSI team and our community partners."

Karen Wallace-Meigs, executive director of WCMS, adds, "If anyone is deserving of such recognition, it is Dr. Michael Newcomer. He retired from a paid position to run this program full time and believes in it with his whole heart. He is a true humanitarian. The CRCSI program is a powerful model of partnership to bring care to those who need it but typically cannot access it."

Dr. Michael Newcomer has been invited to speak at Digestive Disease Week in Washington DC to share the work of WNC CRCSI with an international audience.

About the WNC Colorectal Cancer Screening Initiative

The WNC Colorectal Cancer Screening Initiative (WNC CRCSI) provides vital colorectal cancer screening to average-risk, uninsured, low-income patients between the ages of 45 and 75 in sixteen counties throughout WNC. The program is run jointly by Digestive Health Partners (an independent gastroenterology practice) and the Western Carolina Medical Society. The WNC-CRCSI partners with federally qualified community health centers, safety net clinics, primary care offices, and WCMS's Project Access. The initiative also receives crucial support from the American Cancer Society and from UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center through the Carolina Cancer Screening and CAPRICORN initiatives. The program was founded by local physician Dr. Michael Newcomer of Digestive Health Partners, who remains the medical director of the program. Formed in 2016, the WNC-CRCSI became a nonprofit 501(c)(3) in 2019, housed within WCMS. In 2025, the program screened over 1,000 uninsured individuals and provided 68 high impact colonoscopies.

About the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy

The global leader of advancement in the field of GI endoscopy since 1941, the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy upholds the highest standards for gastrointestinal endoscopic practice and fosters research to encourage continuous innovation. It empowers members with the latest information, state-of-the-art education and unparalleled resources to advance professional and patient care goals. With more than 17,000 members worldwide, ASGE provides a diverse, inclusive and engaged community to foster sharing, learning, advocacy, and growth in GI endoscopy.

About The Western Carolina Medical Society

The Western Carolina Medical Society's mission is to advocate for healthy communities, increase access to affordable healthcare, and promote wellness in WNC. Since 1885, WCMS has been respected for its leadership and innovation in addressing issues of access to affordable health care, disparities in health, and wellness promotion. Throughout its history, WCMS has been at the forefront of working collaboratively with area organizations to address the health challenges facing our community's residents.

For more information about the Western Carolina Medical Society, contact Niki Duff, Senior Director, at niki@mywcms.org or visit www.mywcms.org.

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