

# UCF downtown Orlando campus: 'A big dream' becomes a reality



Community officials help break ground on downtown campus shared by UCF and Valencia College



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**P**orcha Jones is a cheerleader, a track athlete and a strong student with dreams of becoming a medical doctor.

But when Porcha, a 17-year-old Jones High junior, thought of college, she worried about leaving her home. She didn't want to abandon her single mother who takes care of Porcha and her six sisters while she juggles work in a coffee shop.

That's why Porcha said she felt the relief and joy Thursday as officials celebrated the groundbreaking of the downtown Orlando campus of the [University of Central Florida](#) that was close to her home.

Years in the making, the UCF-Valencia College campus is expected to open in fall 2019 with about 7,700 students.

Officials hailed the day as a historic moment in higher education for Orlando and said the new campus will re-energize the downtown west of Interstate 4.

"Today we're making a big dream become a reality," UCF trustee chair Marcos Marchena said in front of several hundred people at the event held at the campus' soon-to-be-construction site between Livingston and Amelia streets.

For Porcha, it means getting access to education five minutes from her home in Parramore.

"I don't have to leave home to go to college," she said at the event where she was surprised with a \$1,000 scholarship to attend the school.

On Thursday, UCF released new renderings of the \$60 million, 148,000-square-foot building that depict large windows and gathering spaces outside.

Inside, the main academic building won't look like typical college lecture halls or classrooms but instead will have about 35 classrooms featuring high-tech computer screens and furniture that's easily movable to encourage group discussions.

UCF students will be able to study digital media, communication, health-care information technology, legal studies, social work and health-care administration.

Meanwhile Valencia College will move culinary and hospitality classes to the downtown campus.

Officials said they believe a downtown campus will give students an opportunity to learn in a way they couldn't at the main campus. They said they want their school to make a difference and connect with residents in the Parramore neighborhood.

Marchena and others thanked the education leaders, elected officials and philanthropists who pushed for the downtown campus.

The project, which was one of UCF President [John Hitt](#)'s top priorities, faced some challenges over the past

few years, including Gov. Rick Scott's vetoing some of the project's state funding in 2015.

However, school officials regrouped and decided to ask the state for less money.

In March 2016, the Legislature approved the final funding piece of \$20 million that was matched with \$20 million UCF raised in donations and \$20 million from the school's budget.

In August, **officials announced the timeline was too ambitious** and they would delay the campus' opening by one year to fall 2019.

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