



Orlando Health Watson Clinic Lakeland Highlands Hospital is Now Receiving Patients

LAKELAND (July 8, 2026) — Orlando Health Watson Clinic Lakeland Highlands Hospital received its first patients on Wednesday, July 8, when its doors officially opened at 9 a.m.

"This is an exciting day in Polk County," said Carlos Carrasco, president of Orlando Health Watson Clinic Lakeland Highlands Hospital. "Our experienced and dedicated physicians and staff are ready and looking forward to serving this community. Today represents the launch of something new, a truly unique collaboration between Watson Clinic and Orlando Health, focused on improving the health and quality of life of the greater Polk County region."

It is the first hospital opening in Lakeland in more than a century and the 50th Orlando Health facility in Florida, including hospitals, clinics, institutes and free-standing emergency departments. The hospital includes:

- 77.29 acres
- 558,233 square feet
- 7 floors
- 306 beds in private rooms
- 49 exam, 5 fast track, and 20 observation beds
- 8 labor and delivery, 28 post-partum, 12 neonatal intensive care beds
- 2 C-section rooms
- 13 operating rooms
- 2 heart catheterization labs
- One 1.5T MRI and one 3T MRI
- 1 ground-level helicopter pad

Watson Clinic Chief Executive Officer Jason Hirsbrunner said that when Watson Clinic was approached about the possibility of collaborating with Orlando Health on the hospital, they "jumped at the opportunity."

"After 85 years of serving the healthcare needs of our community, we knew we could offer the Watson Clinic physicians and providers our patients already know and trust to this exciting project," said Hirsbrunner. "We are confident that this hospital – coupled with Watson Clinic's two freestanding facilities on this campus - will elevate the health and vitality of our community for generations to come."

The hospital is already an economic driver in the community. Up to 700 construction jobs were created on site, including local subcontractors. More than 1,500 new permanent jobs were created.

There will be another 200 jobs added to that number by the end of the year when Orlando Health opens a free-standing emergency department in North Lakeland.

Of the new employees, 600 are nurses and 75 are physicians new to the market — between new hires for Watson Clinic and Orlando Health and Emergency Physicians of Central Florida. They are in addition to the 200 board-certified physicians already on staff at Watson Clinic. Many of the new positions are considered high-skill, high-wage jobs, well above the average annual salary for Polk County.

According to the Lakeland Economic Development Council, the hospital is now the sixth-largest employer in Lakeland. It is the 15th-largest employer in Polk County, according to the Central Florida Development Council.

The hospital will continue to grow. In coming months, a 12-bed neonatal-intensive-care unit will open as part of the facility's focus of babies, brains and hearts.

Photo Caption: Orlando Health Watson Clinic Lakeland Highlands Hospital administrators cut the ribbon Wednesday morning, July 8, 2026, marking the opening of the hospital. From left, President Carlos Carrasco, administrative assistant Chelsea Barberena, Chief Nursing Officer Jenny Beakley, Chief Operating Officer Victoria Wagner, and Chief Financial Officer Jennifer Grafton.

Video of this morning's ribbon cutting is available. Contact Kimberly Moore at kimberly.moore@orlandohealth.com or 863-944-2915.

About Orlando Health: *Orlando Health is a private not-for-profit, integrated academic healthcare system with \$15 billion of assets under management, that serves the southeastern United States – including Florida and Alabama – and Puerto Rico. With corporate offices in Orlando, Florida the system provides a complete continuum of care across a network of medical centers and institutes, community and specialty hospitals, physician practices, urgent care facilities, skilled nursing facilities, home healthcare, and long-term and behavioral health care services. Founded more than 100 years ago, Orlando Health's mission is to improve the health and the quality of life of the individuals and communities we serve. The system provided nearly \$2 billion in community impact in the form of community benefit programs and services, Medicare shortfalls, bad debt, community-building activities and capital investments in FY 24, the most recent period for which the information is available. For more information, visit orlandohealth.com, or follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [X](#).*

About Watson Clinic: *As one of the largest multispecialty medical clinics in the southeast, Watson Clinic provides comprehensive healthcare services to residents of Lakeland and surrounding communities. First established in 1941, Watson Clinic has grown to include over 200 board-certified physicians representing more than 40 medical and surgical specialties. The Clinic is proud to deliver quality healthcare to every generation from our Main Clinic location at 4060 Lakeland Highlands Road in Lakeland, as well as 20 additional convenient locations throughout Polk, Pasco and Hillsborough counties. More information is available at www.WatsonClinic.com, or follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [X](#).*

xxx

Jenny Baker

Senior Public Relations & Communications Manager | Marketing Communications & Media Relations

Watson Clinic
4263 S. Florida Ave.
Lakeland, FL 33813
Ph: 863-904-4654

Media Cell: 863-289-1815

Mission Statement: "The Clinic medical staff shall be dedicated to the provision of comprehensive medical services of the highest quality, at a reasonable cost, while constantly striving for excellence in the best interest of patient care. This shall be accomplished within the cooperative framework of a group practice."

NOTICE OF CONFIDENTIALITY ----- The information in this email, including attachments, may be confidential and/or privileged and may contain confidential health information. This email is intended to be reviewed only by the individual or organization named as addressee. If you have received this email in error please notify Watson Clinic immediately by return message to the sender. Destroy all copies of this message and any attachments. Please note that any views or opinions presented in this email are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Watson Clinic. Confidential health information is protected by state and federal law, including, but not limited to: The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 and related regulations.