According to the University System of Georgia Task Force on Health Profession Education, all health professions in Georgia face significant shortages over the next decade. Limited resources and instructional capacity require that the priority for the next five years be focused on those professions most in jeopardy.¹

Although they are not often personally involved with patients, laboratory technologists and technicians play a crucial role in the process of providing personalized care. They generate vitally important data for identifying and treating cancer, heart disease, diabetes and many other health conditions. Using sophisticated biomedical instrumentation and technology, as well as highly skilled manual techniques, clinical laboratory professionals examine and analyze body fluids, tissues and cells to identify bacteria, parasites and other microorganisms. They analyze the chemical constituents of body fluids, cross match donor blood for transfusions, and test blood for drug levels to measure the efficacy of particular treatments. They also evaluate test results for accuracy and help interpret them for the physician.

Employment of clinical laboratory workers is expected to grow 14 percent between 2006 and 2016, faster than the average for all occupations. The volume of laboratory tests continues to increase with both population growth and the development of new types of tests. Although hospitals are expected to continue to be the major employer of clinical laboratory workers, employment is expected to grow faster in medical and diagnostic laboratories, offices of physicians and all other ambulatory health care services.²

The need to train new Clinical Laboratory Technologists becomes apparent when examining recent publications on the issue. Although Coordinating Council on the Clinical Laboratory Workforce members have different perspectives on many issues, they agree that we face a serious challenge in ensuring an adequate supply of clinical laboratory professionals. There is a significant gap between the expected retirements in the coming years and the number of professionals entering the field.³

The shortage of Clinical Laboratory Technologists is further pointed out by examining the numbers in a recent article in a trade publication of the American Society for Clinical Pathology;⁴
• 44 percent of laboratories currently report difficulty in hiring
• About 150,000 new technologists will be needed by 2014; 81,000 to replace retirees, 68,000 for new positions
• There has been a 67 percent drop in new CLS/MT graduates since 1977 – 6,519 graduates in 1977, 2,141 in 2005
• 40 percent of the current workers will retire in 10 years
• There has been a 71 percent decline in the number of accredited training programs since 1975 – 770 NACCLS accredited programs in 1975, 222 in 2007
• Average age of current workforce is 49.2 years

Gwinnett Technical College is in an excellent position to support the growth of clinical laboratory technology jobs in Gwinnett County and Georgia through expansion of current programs and implementation of new programs in its new Life Sciences Center, scheduled to open in 2011. However, implementation of these new and expanded programs will require additional facility resources not covered by current funding sources. Gwinnett Tech has undertaken the Legacy of Lives campaign to raise significant funds to meet these needs through:
• Endowed Chair of Clinical Laboratory Technology¹
• Endowed Clinical Laboratory Technology Professorships¹
• Lab and Classroom Naming Opportunities
• Student Scholarships
• Stipends for children of students to attend the Hudgens Early Education Center
• Access to refresher courses, both classroom and online

¹ University System of Georgia Task Force on Health Professions Education, Final Report, June 2006, pg 4
³ Clinical Council on the Clinical Laboratory Workforce website www.ascls.org
⁴ Lee M. Hilborne, ASCP Battles Workforce Shortage on Many Fronts, Critical Values; Volume 1 Issue 4, Oct 2008