



Community unity for our kids

Hospital partners join forces to bring the comforts of home to young patients and their families

By Susan L. Comer

You've heard the expression, "If these walls could talk ... " Well, the walls at the new state-of-the-art Carilion Clinic Children's Hospital will speak volumes to the children and families who enter them. For families, the message will be one of comfort, support and hope.

The kids may simply hear, "Psst! Want to play?"

The goal, says Carilion's Linda Hodges, who has overseen fund development for the facility, was a child-friendly, family focused environment. With the help of a dozen caring partners, Carilion Clinic Children's Hospital—the only children's hospital in southwest Virginia—has emerged as just such a place.

Says Hodges, "Our partners joined us and made a statement that children are special—that children require a specialized environment—and we're going to stand by them, be supportive of them, and get them through the process of their medical care."

Monkeys, giraffes and birds, oh my!

Carilion Clinic Children's Hospital cares annually for 600 premature infants; 1,600 sick, injured and chronically ill children; and 300 children with cancer or blood diseases. "Most kids in the young ages," says Hodges, "don't have the cognitive development to understand, 'What's wrong with me? Why am I here?'" They suffer separation anxiety and fear the unknown. The right environment, she says, can help calm them.

In the new facility, that calming process begins in a lobby adorned with whimsical artwork—frolicking 3D monkeys, giraffes, a toucan and an elephant—commissioned by partner SunTrust.

"We're very involved in the community when it comes to arts and culture," says Patti Dickerson, vice president, Regional Sales/Marketing manager, Western Virginia, SunTrust, "and we thought that tied in nicely with some of the other things we do." SunTrust also provided funds for bright, sunny children's furniture to complement the décor. "When I walked in there," says Dickerson, "I felt like a kid again."

Playtime shouldn't cease when a child is hospitalized, so the Junior League of Roanoke Valley (JLRV) funded a playroom where kids can just be kids. The centerpiece is a NatureMakers artificial tree housing a computer, bookshelves and a friendly toy chipmunk. JLRV volunteers will organize monthly activities.

Many children's hospitals don't have a space in which teens can watch movies, listen to music, or hang out with friends. But, thanks to a donation from the Alicia Rose "Victorious" Foundation—named for an inspiring teenager who battled a rare cancer—Carilion boasts a teen room with a 42-inch plasma TV, computers, DVDs and a jukebox.

And in the treatment room, the Roanoke chapter of Beta Sigma Phi, Preceptor Omicron, has poured time and talent into an "ocean" mural that will ultimately cover the walls and ceiling to distract kids during difficult procedures. Instead of focusing on discomfort, a distressed patient can watch splashing dolphins or look for the bunny cloud in the sky.

Touch of home

Just as young patients need soothing and support, so do their families, and one thing the family of a hospitalized child desperately needs is a private place nearby for doctor consultations or to regroup.



“We didn’t want those rooms to be a conference table and four chairs which would be a normal standard for a hospital,” says Hodges. “We wanted them to feel like a home.” That meant comfy sofas, warm lighting, art and other homey touches, a care package that the Blue Ridge District Woman’s Clubs voted to deliver. The Clubs raised funds for two family consult rooms (in Pediatrics and Labor & Delivery). As many members are mothers and grandmothers, says District president Sharon Gibson, “[the project] just touched their hearts and the women came through.”

A family consult room is particularly crucial for families of Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) patients. After their daughter Caroline died in a Connecticut NICU with only a thin curtain for privacy, Jocelyn and Gary Doyens created the concept of “Caroline’s Room” where parents can strategize with doctors and, in cases such as Caroline’s, spend their last precious moments with their child in dignity. Carilion is home to the nation’s sixth “Caroline’s Room,” which Roanoke-based architectural/engineering firm Hayes, Seay, Mattern & Mattern funded.

“We’ve had several employees that have spent time in [Carilion’s] NICU either as parents or grandparents—maybe they were babies there, too, as long as we’ve been here—so they’ve seen the excellent treatment,” says Steve Garrett, HSMM senior vice president/director of Healthcare. “I personally have seen it. My grandchildren went through there. We’ve seen the miracle babies. We know the need for special rooms like Caroline’s Room where parents can go for consultations, quiet time, family meetings, and prayer.”

Building our future

Additional partners include Wachovia Foundation, which funded a Pediatric family waiting area with play spaces for siblings and a kitchen where families can prepare meals and eat together at a dining table. And located just steps from the NICU, The Ronald McDonald Family Room, donated by Ronald McDonald House Charities of Southwest Virginia, is staffed 12 hours a day, 365 days a year, by trained volunteers who provide snacks and other support services to families reluctant to leave their child, even for a cafeteria break.

Other partnering projects include a family resource center sponsored by Physicians to Children and staffed by the Virginia Department of Health’s Roanoke Area Care Connection for Children, and an Outpatient Lobby playroom, compliments of HoneyTree Early Learning Centers. Finally, Children’s Miracle Network and the Barnhart Fund have generously supported the overall design, branding and amenities of Carilion Clinic Children’s Hospital.

“Hopefully,” says Hodges, “we’ll have more partners in the future to help make a difficult process for families manageable. Children’s hospitals are a community effort. It’s about helping children and families in their greatest time of need.”

To learn more about Carilion Clinic Children’s Hospital and how you can become involved, contact Linda Hodges at (540) 224-6972 or lsbhodges@carilion.com.