Lodge-like facility delivers advanced care

Article by Amy Eagle • Photos by Kyle Dreier Photography

‘MOUNTAIN MODERN’

Ellen Wilhoit, FACHE, president and chief administrative officer of LeConte Medical Center, Sevierville, Tenn., calls the design of the medical center’s replacement hospital “Mountain Modern.” Sevierville is located at the edge of Great Smoky Mountains National Park in an area of rustic natural beauty. The design includes indigenous stone, wood and wood-looking materials that give the hospital a lodge sensibility suitable to its mountain home, and a contemporary, sophisticated polish reflective of advanced medical care. “We wanted to create a new, really positive image” that goes beyond the medical center’s small community hospital roots, Wilhoit says.

The new medical campus includes a hospital, women’s center, medical office building (MOB) and cancer center. It was designed through a collaborative effort of BarberMcMurry architects, Knoxville, Tenn., and Earl Swensson Associates Inc. (ESa), Nashville, Tenn.
BarberMcMurry architects took the lead role in designing the women’s center and MOB, while ESa led the functional planning and design of the hospital and cancer center.

**Convenient flow**

The hospital’s main entrance opens onto a two-story lobby featuring the same natural stone used on the building’s exterior. Wood-laminate columns and resin panels with birch accents add to the natural feel.

“The surrounding area is just beautiful. We wanted to bring in those types of materials, the stone and the wood,” says Jennifer Satterfield, IIDA, LEED AP, interior designer, ESa. A palette of soothing blue, green and terra cotta enhances the natural look throughout the hospital.

The lobby rotunda features a custom light fixture of contemporary design centered above a medallion pattern in the flooring. A reception desk, gift shop, dining area and chapel all are located near the entrance. “Everything for the public is [right] there at their fingertips,” says Satterfield.

Enclosed walkways off each side of the entry lead to the women’s center and MOB. To the right of the main lobby, there is a diagnostic waiting area for imaging and related services; to the left, is the surgical waiting room. Patients are processed and escorted to the appropriate care area according to a specific flow pattern. The design is meant to separate public, patient and staff circulation routes to minimize cross traffic, explains Harold Petty, AIA, director of medical design and ESa’s principal-in-charge on the project.

**Expanded, efficient care**

The hospital expects to see 50,000 patients in the emergency department (ED) this year, with about one-third of them being tourists at the national park and nearby towns of Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge.

At the previous hospital, the volume of emergency care was about 40,000 patients per year in an ED built for 17,000. “That was one of the key reasons we needed a new facility,” Wilhoit says.

In addition to being larger, the new ED has private treatment rooms for increased confidentiality, safety, security and comfort. A decontamination area addresses the newer threat of bioterrorism. The ED is laid out for efficient patient flow. “Well-defined paths separate people coming in from people coming out,” explains Craig Holloway, AIA, ESa project manager. Adjacent surgery and radiology departments enable patients to be moved swiftly to either area. A patient transport elevator located just outside the ED facilitates transfers to the intensive care unit.

The emergency, surgery and radiology departments are positioned on the periphery of the first floor to allow future expansion of any of these departments without compromising other areas.

**Medical-surgical care**

The facility’s patient units are arranged in two L-shaped wings with a central elevator hub and support core. The support core includes physician dictation rooms and similar staff workspaces, as well as secure medication storage and dispensing. A business station is located on each side of the elevator core to provide a work area for the unit secretary and such support members of the hospital care team as dieticians and therapists. There is a decentralized nurse station and supply area in each patient unit wing.

For additional privacy, the patient rooms feature inboard lighting. During construction, the builders erected on-site mock-ups of the hospital’s exterior walls to test different materials. The roughly 10-by-12-foot wall sections included as many exterior details — such as windows and copings — as possible to determine the best selections, says Driskill. He adds the project’s detailing changed significantly as a result of what the team learned from the mock-up walls.

The stone copings were changed to a metal material of the same color that cost less, was easier to install and looks the same from ground level. The original design also called for a local, rounded river rock in place of the indigenous cut stone used in the final building. Driskill says trying to build with river rock to achieve both aesthetically pleasing and water-tight results proved difficult. “The change we made in the stone was particularly beneficial,” he says.
toilets that provide a buffer between the patient bed and the corridor, says Holloway. The design also allows for larger exterior windows to maximize views and natural light.

Laminate panels, designed with input from hospital staff, improve the look and functionality of the headwall in the patient rooms. The custom-built units were a “relatively low-cost item,” Holloway says, that “add a lot of warmth to the room as well as provide an opportunity to organize a lot of the chaos that’s typically on the headwall.”

Rather than place a nursing computer on an ergonomic arm, the team designed a narrow cabinet about six inches deep that can be closed and locked to store the computer securely and essentially out of sight.

Medical mission

According to Wilhoit, the facility is attracting new physicians, including some who practice in specialties the hospital previously had not been able to offer. She credits much of the success of the project to the support of the hospital’s foundation and Covenant Health, the Knoxville, Tenn.-based, community-owned health system that includes LeConte Medical Center.

“Most hospitals our size wouldn’t have the facility we have without these extra resources,” Wilhoit says. Holloway, who — like several members of the project team — has family in the Sevier County area who use the hospital, is grateful for the opportunity to serve patients through design.

He says, “We may not be able to be there on a daily basis managing to people and being a part of that medical mission … but we can create spaces that allow people to do that work.”

— AMY EAGLE

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** Flanking buildings complete care picture **

The health unit coordinator station of the Dolly Parton birthing unit features a photograph of its benefactor, while birch twigs sandwiched within composite lipped panels grace the front of the desk.