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- Dr. Bruce Berg, Campus Dean, Florida State University College of Medicine Sarasota, FL
- Dr. Meg Lowman, Professor of Biology and Environmental Studies, New College of Florida
- DWY Landscape Architects
- Florida Studio Theatre
- Florida West Coast Symphony
- Hermitage Artist Retreat
- Kiwanis Clubs of Sarasota County
- Mary GrandPré, Illustrator of Harry Potter series
- Milliken
- Ringling College of Art + Design, Interior Design Department & Ringling Design Center
- TRO Jung|Brannen
- Willis A. Smith Construction, Inc.
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How You Can Help:

1. Refer cancer survivors and caregivers who are in need of help and hope.
2. Share your story of hope with others: www.mystoryofhope.org
3. Volunteer your time and services to provide hope.
4. Request a presentation for your group or become a partner, contact Jay Lockaby at jay@wellness-swfl.org or (941) 921-5539
5. Make a pledge to help support Building Hope. Visit: www.helpusbuidhope.com

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Place Matters

The Evolution of a Wellness Community



Watercolor by Don Brandes

Excerpted from June 2008 *Healthcare Design* Magazine

“A small non-profit ‘thinks big’ in developing an innovative prototype facility for supporting people affected by cancer.”

From *Healthcare Design* magazine, June 2008, “Place Matters” by Johnette Isham

When internationally renowned artist Leslie Lerner visited The Wellness Community (TWC) in Sarasota, Florida, after his bladder cancer diagnosis, he found many of the resources and support he sought. But while he appreciated the helpful, caring people he met, he also found that he longed for a facility located in a more natural environment. The current one, while welcoming, was a retrofitted space in a commercial strip mall.

As advances in research and medicine continue to improve cancer survival rates, the influence that psycho-social support and environment have on improving

can improve medical results and user satisfaction, as well as staff retention and financial performance.

The Wellness Community learned from Lerner’s experience. Using the evidence, it is designing a healing campus through the creative combination of innovative partnerships, participatory planning and evidence-based design techniques. Their new optimal healing environment scheduled for completion in 2009 will be a model for the 26 other Wellness Communities operating worldwide, illustrating green architecture that combines healing, art, design and nature.

The Organization

Serving 1,600 people a year, TWC of Southwest Florida offers free professionally-led support groups, nutrition and exercise programs, educational workshops, and mind-body classes to people affected by cancer. Its programs are effective. Of the support group participants surveyed, 95% found participation helpful; 90% felt less alone; 84% said their attitude improved; and 57% said they felt better physically.

Sarasota’s Wellness Community is a leader among the other Wellness Communities. In 2006, it received the Center of Excellence Award and the highest Quality Assurance rating ever achieved by any Wellness Community from the organization’s national office. Vicki Kennedy, Vice President for TWC’s national office, noted:

“Their dynamic cancer support programs and superb stewardship of resources make them a role model for community-based cancer service everywhere.”

Though the quality of TWC programs is unquestionably world-class, its physical surroundings are ready for expansion and upgrade. With this in mind, the Building Hope project was established to:

- serve thousands more cancer patients, survivors, caregivers and children; and
- create an optimal healing environment for psychosocial oncology; and
- to be a role model for other Wellness Communities worldwide innovatively combining healing, arts, design and nature in a green facility.



The Wellness Community Courtyard

Watercolor by Don Brandes

the quality of life becomes more critical than ever. Surroundings that incorporate the natural environment help restore a sense of optimism to cancer survivors and their loved ones. With no way to effectively provide natural light and access to the outdoors, The Wellness Community realized they needed to take a quantum leap if they were going to more effectively help thousands of individuals and families affected by cancer each year.

Compelling evidence indicates that place matters. Over the past decade, The Center for Health Design, Health Care Without Harm and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation have teamed up to investigate studies and projects that document design’s impact on healthcare outcomes. In 2004, one project: The Role of the Physical Environment in the Hospital of the 21st Century: A Once in-a-Lifetime Opportunity, examined over 600 studies linking patient health and quality of care with the way a hospital is designed. The growing scientific base shows that specific design and architectural elements

To guide the Building Hope initiative, an integrated design-build team was formed led by Jay Lockaby, TWC’s Executive Director, and the author (Johnette Isham, consultant and Project Director for Building Hope). Design partners include Carlson Studio Architecture, Wilson Miller Engineering, Stewart Engineering and Willis A. Smith Construction, DWY Landscape Architects, TRO Jung|Brannen, Fishman & Associates, Hees & Associates and Green Building Services.

Cancer survivors, volunteers, Sarasota County staff, and TWC staff and board members joined the design team for several charrettes to offer input into the design of the new LEED gold-registered facility. The charrette participants discussed how to make the five-acre site plan work harmoniously to produce the best health and client satisfaction outcomes, while conserving natural resources and reducing operating expenses.

TWC also established mutually beneficial relationships with three nationally-recognized colleges: New College of Florida, Florida State University’s College of Medicine in Sarasota and Ringling College of Art and Design.

In fall 2006, six upper-level Ringling College interior design students collaborated on an assignment to address the project’s design concept: illustrating the transforming power of connection and choice.

Combining studies of existing facilities, including focus group research of cancer patients and caregivers, with healthcare design evidence that included developments in psychosocial oncology, the students developed a comprehensive interiors program. In alignment with TWC’s Patient Active philosophy, the design enables participants to easily choose their own avenues of support, education and hope. Individuals may select from a variety of environments—active, contemplative, uplifting, calming, social and home-like. Connections with the restorative aspects of nature are infused inside and out to capture the views of the surrounding 600-acre nature preserve. Spaces are designed to feed the creative spirit and support innovative partnerships with Florida West Coast Symphony, Florida Studio Theatre, Asolo Repertory Theatre, Hermitage Artist Retreat and other cultural organizations. The quality of life for people affected by cancer will be enriched by visiting artists throughout the year.

To ensure a positive alignment of physical and organizational design, TWC’s strategic planning process used Appreciative Inquiry, a proven organizational development framework that in the past 20 years has demonstrated profound results for building an organization’s capacity, collaborative creativity, profitability and on-going sustainability.

Using this strength-based approach, TWC refined its collective vision of a community of exceptional care. Cancer survivors, caregivers, volunteers, staff and board members were joined by 15 community partners to illuminate the key qualities that were sought for TWC’s optimal healing environment, i.e.:

- amplify community and emphasize the whole person
- create a sustainable environment with the healthiest materials
- build on the power of the arts for healing
- increase programs for children and families
- increase technology use—be both high touch and high tech
- lead the nation in new thinking about cancer care and green architecture

New building features include:

- a teaching kitchen
- a studio for exercise and meditation
- an expressive arts studio for children
- an “Ask the Doctor” Living Room for educational seminars
- gallery spaces for patients, children and professional artists
- a library café with computers and materials for learning and connecting
- healing gardens for horticultural therapy, personal reflection and Tai Chi
- a community room for educational programs and performances
- technology for remote program support: podcasts and streaming video

Use of Evidence-based Design

The use of evidence-based design is helping TWC apply resources wisely to build a better, safer, more efficient place that creates a compelling human experience. In other words, the impact of design decisions will be measured and evaluated.

Other Wellness Communities worldwide will benefit from lessons learned. For these reasons, the Building Hope project promises to change the face of psychosocial oncology.

For a complete on-line version of this article visit:
www.helpusbuildhope.com