



Southern hospitality

Benjamin Russell Hospital for Children incorporates highly developed technology, patient- and family-centered design, and an uplifting environment for Alabama families **By Shandi Matambanadzo**

THE BENJAMIN RUSSELL Hospital for Children (BRHFC) in Birmingham, Ala., a new landmark on the city's landscape, is the largest single health-care project built to date in the state of Alabama. With 332 beds plus 48 bassinets, the \$400 million, 760,000-square-foot hospital uses color and design to appeal to children of all ages.

Early in the process, BRHFC brought in HKS Inc. (Dallas) and Giattina Aycock Studio (Birmingham, Ala.) for planning and programming. The hospital and the design teams also met with user groups to develop guiding principles that would direct overall facility design as well as organization of its service lines. Previously, cardiovascular and other services were being performed at the university, creating a fractured system. The goal was to bring all services in-house, create a campus with comprehensive care for children, and integrate family-centered care.

Patients, parents, and staff all provided input into the interiors, with the resulting design shaped to avoid a look that was too whimsical, cutesy, or lacking in sophistication for older-age children and adults in the building. HKS's Iris Dates, interior designer, explains that one of the driving forces for the project was centered on positive distraction. "We wanted the space to be childlike but not childish," she says. "I would run the idea through a filter: No matter what we design, would a 2-year-old girl as well as an 18-year-old boy like it?"

Themes were created using color and art, and are unique to specific areas and floors. Works of art from Alabama artists brighten the walls of each floor, while different-colored cubes—built into the walls along corridors—provide alcoves for privacy. A colorful, meandering path and fun visual cues help with wayfinding throughout the building. Doug Compton, principal designer, HKS, says the aim was to simplify the journey for patients and families as much as possible. An abundance of windows throughout the hospital provides views of the Birmingham cityscape and beyond. The main circulation areas are situated on the perimeter of the building so that natural

Benjamin Russell Hospital for Children's (BRHFC) use of glass and color on the exterior façade and throughout the building—as well as the sheer size of the structure—makes it a prominent feature of the Birmingham cityscape.

HKS INC./BLAKE MARVIN





The winding path is an entertaining and practical aid for wayfinding, while colorful seating in different shapes and sizes adds a sense of fun.

light and exterior views can provide orientation for patients and families.

Perfecting the patient room

Modular headwalls, built off-site and then installed, were used in all patient rooms. And after extensive research, BRHFC decided on mirrored patient rooms with outboard toilets instead of same-handed rooms.

"A same-handed room isn't a universal truth and doesn't necessarily give you the best patient-safe environment every time," says Ron Dennis, principal-in-charge, HKS. "BRHFC looked at the research and made a decision that would simplify some of the complexities of their operations while still providing quality care and safety for the patient."

The surgical theaters and exam rooms, however, were designed as same-handed rooms to address a different flow of function as the staff in these areas delivers a particular type of service.

Future flexibility

Mike McDevitt, executive vice president of facilities and technology for BRHFC, explains that a partnership was formed with a healthcare IT consulting and design firm to establish a thorough needs assessment and planning process to create a technology platform that would support future modifications and expansion. "We knew that we needed to create a platform that would allow us to embed technology in the future and still be relevant today," he says.

In addition, BRHFC is pursuing LEED Gold status and will be the first LEED-certified hospital in Alabama. Green roofs offer thermal protection for the building, while captured water from its air handler units is used to irrigate landscaping and feed the chiller system.

"We were looking at creative ways to reduce cost on the project, and so we seized an idea to take the \$35 million central energy plant (CEP), which would supply hot and chilled water, and created a D-BOOM [design/build/own/operate/maintain] model," McDevitt says. By working with the City of Birmingham, a Government Utility Service Corporation (GUSC) was established as the utility plant owner from which the hospital