

Green from the Ground Up

It's a simple premise: A healthier environment supports healthier humans. The idea doesn't go unnoticed in healthcare; many conditions, from asthma and allergies to infectious diseases and mental health, have been linked in some way to the environment. So when the time came to draw up plans for the new Children's at Hughes Spalding building, talk of constructing a healthy space for children quickly turned to that of a "green" facility.

But "going green" (also called sustainability) in meaningful ways is no simple task. "Sustainability is much bigger than recycling soda cans," said Bill Auten, Director, Facilities, Children's at Hughes Spalding. "It means reducing risks to life-sustaining aspects of the environment, like water, air, climate and renewable resources. A sustainability program includes actions to reduce environmental damage, as well as efforts to protect the environment and even prevent damage, where possible. It requires organizational commitment from top to bottom, and a common-sense strategy that doesn't compromise the health of our patients."

Children's hopes to lead the green effort among Georgia hospitals and the nation by opening the first LEED-certified hospital building in the state. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification is the national standard for recognizing building sustainability. The first phase of the new building is slated to open this fall, with completion a year later. "This project gives us the unique ability to infuse 'green' into every aspect of the facility—inside and out," Auten said.

Toward certification, organizations accrue LEED points in five green design categories: sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources and indoor environmental quality. The new Children's at Hughes Spalding will feature:

- An underground well to capture rainwater for cooling towers and landscaping.

- Energy-efficient air handlers, carbon dioxide monitors, lighting and appliances installed throughout the building to conserve energy and improve air quality.
- Earth-friendly and recycled supplies to reduce waste, while the use of select local materials will conserve transportation-related fuel and pollution.
- Outdoor green spaces to preserve nature and offer a healing, peaceful atmosphere for families and employees.
- Select construction materials from the building being torn down to fill in the hole it leaves behind, reducing construction waste.
- Eco-friendly finish materials (covering floors, walls and ceilings) to reduce indoor air contaminants and improve air quality, providing a healthier environment for patients and staff.

Studies have shown that environmental improvements associated with sustainable buildings can actually shorten patients' length of stay, reduce reliance on medication, and lessen mental and physical stress. "We know that facilities more in line with the environment pay multiple long-term dividends. They help patients recover more quickly. Friends and family feel more comfortable while visiting patients in healthier surroundings. And employee productivity and satisfaction are likely to improve, as well," said Auten.

But Auten points out that many of Children's LEED efforts are transparent to employees. "When you walk through a green building, you won't necessarily notice the more powerful air filters, reduced contaminants, energy efficient appliances or special lighting. You simply notice a feeling of greater well being." And, in terms of cost, many of these innovations do cost more up front, but they can actually reduce operating costs over time.

"On many levels, the Children's Mission is naturally aligned with environmental causes," Auten said. "This construction project is just one more way we're playing a pivotal role in improving the lives of our patients." 



Front drive up and drop off entrance to the new Children's at Hughes Spalding building.



The proposed new hospital building complex, with green spaces and a meditation garden, at left.



The shaded area at right shows where future expansion might take place.