

Willson Hospice
fulfills community
commitments through
design, function

By Ila Burdette and Amy Sickeler

A place to
flourish



*a*lbany Community Hospice's remarkable success lies in two commitments: to broaden its 25-year engagement with terminally-ill patients and their families in its 11-county service area, and to create an ecological oasis available to all its neighbors in southwest Georgia. Willson Hospice House fulfills these commitments.

The new 34,000-square-foot LEED-Silver facility houses administrative space for 50 staff as well as 18 new inpatient beds. Its intentional inclusion of many stakeholders—patients, families, staff, community members, donors, volunteers and visitors—aligns with The Caritas Project's emphasis on the extension and invigoration of healthcare's traditional relationships. By creating a project that strengthens the potentially rich links between individual users, its provider organization and its neighborhood, Willson Hospice embodies Caritas's new paradigm of generative space, and has earned its prestigious 2011 "Place to Flourish" award. Presented by its founder, Dr. Wayne Ruga, at the recently held Healthcare Facilities Symposium in Chicago, the annual distinction recognizes one project nationally that best produces measurable, systemic and sustainable improvement in the health and well-being of individuals and communities.



1. Willson Hospice House was carefully developed to preserve perimeter wetlands, and create a series of gardens and walking trails through the natural forest of dogwood, pines and oaks. While access to nature is an important part of care, the project was also planned from its inception to be an ecological oasis for its larger community. 2. Front lobby/reception area of Willson Hospice House. 3. The family living room includes conversation, dining and play areas with doors to two screened terraces. 4. View from the chapel terrace into the central west courtyard.



Left: A headwall disguises medical switches and outlets, while keeping all within ergonomic reach. Below: A patient room with a view of the tranquility garden. French doors enable beds to roll outside onto the porch. A window seat doubles as a family sleep area.

gain and control glare, efficient double-pane low-E glazing, and R-21 wall insulation and R-30 roof insulation. Potable water usage has been reduced by 21.9 percent. More than 80 percent of spaces are daylight; more than 92 percent have outdoor views. In addition, more than 13 percent of construction materials contain recycled content. Urea-formaldehyde products were eliminated. The project features a variety of rapidly renewable materials (cork, bamboo, MCT), and uses healthy products like zero- and low-VOC adhesives, sealants, paints and coatings and Green Label carpets and pads.

A warmer welcome

Architecturally, the hospice welcomes the community into its small-scale volumes, breaking down its overall form into approachable small households. Simple geometric shapes with sloping-gabled roofs and large eaves echo local agrarian buildings. The building incorporates familiar materials like fieldstone, stained cedar, pine and Douglas fir to impart texture and natural color. It emphasizes transparency, opening views into the heavily treed woodland landscape wherever possible. Major gathering rooms such as the lobby, family living rooms, chapel, sunroom and multipurpose room have high-exposed pine plank ceilings, glu-lam beams and tall wood window walls. In a healthcare world

often polished with stainless steel and terrazzo, Willson Hospice offers a distinctively different warmer invitation.

Willson carefully tailors spaces to each of its user groups. Patient rooms have unusually extensive-stained wood trim and generous millwork. Headwalls disguise medical outlets and switches. Overhead ceiling fans and double shades, as well as individual room thermostats, provide maximum patient control. Reading lights are attached to the beds, not the headwalls, so patients can adjust the bed locations, even taking them

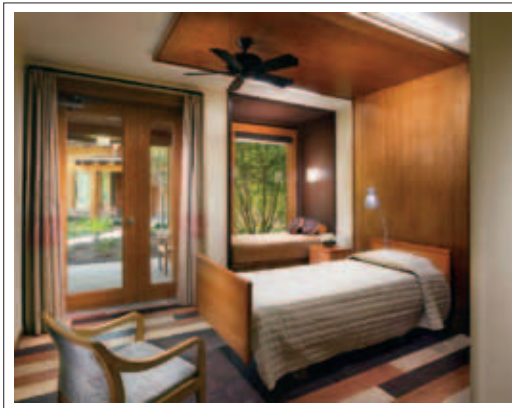
out onto shared porches. Beds for family members staying overnight are built into window seats, an arrangement that keeps crucial nursing space clear around the patient beds. Large windows with corner glazing and French doors provide outdoor views and light.

Family-focused

Three living rooms accommodate families; each lies at the heart of a cluster of six patient rooms. Living rooms are outfitted with a reading inglenook, millwork for children's games, a dining area and conversation area as well as ready access

Opened in June 2010 at a construction cost of \$9.9 million, the facility was modeled from inception to protect to take full advantage of its extraordinary site. The design team studied the property with a renowned local ecologist and implemented preservation measures for indigenous species (native atamasco lilies, dogwoods, pines, oaks and Spanish moss). A 1-mile walking trail loops the site perimeter, connecting the front courtyard, family gardens and outdoor chapel with boardwalks and a viewing platform at the bird sanctuary. Site development was restricted to 14 acres, leaving 93.5 percent unspoiled. In recognition of its sensitive environmental stewardship, including a Natural Resource Management Plan detailing measures to prevent erosion and stormwater pollution and to conserve water, Audubon International named Willson a Silver Signature Sanctuary, the first and only healthcare facility to earn that designation.

Willson's additional sustainable measures include the reduction of its energy usage by 20.8 percent through the incorporation of high-efficiency water source heat pumps and condensing boilers, shading devices to minimize heat



onto two outdoor terraces protected by sunscreens. Other family spaces include a kitchenette with banquette seating, a dedicated children's playroom, a quiet room, sunroom and chapel, all facing into the central courtyard.

Staff features include bedside charting and pocket pagers to eliminate institutional overhead paging. Nurse servers at each patient room allow medical supplies to be stocked at any hour from the corridor side without interrupting patients. Two of the three households are served by small nurse work areas using simple round tables to encourage family/caregiver conversations. The main nurse station in the third pod is finished with stained birch and detailed to be approachable.

Access to outdoor areas of respite is particularly important for every hospice patient, family and staff member. The east side of the property contains a series of private patient/family landscaped tranquility gardens woven between the pods, connected by continuous walkways leading to the outdoor chapel and to longer site trails. On the more public west side, a central courtyard is bordered by the crescent of the administration wing and the three patient pods.

Although Willson Hospice has been open just a little more than one year, its benefits are ongoing and measurable. The program reaches previously underserved popu-

lations with appropriate and efficient inpatient care. More than a dozen patients each month are admitted directly from the local hospital, freeing the more expensive acute-care beds for their intended use and expanding the parent hospital's capacity.

Perhaps most extraordinary have been the astonishing number and variety of community groups now active on the campus. Organizations ranging from the local chapter of the Rotary Club to master gardeners, from Darton Community College's cross-country track team to the town cancer support group all convene, train, volunteer and teach at the facility. Willson staff honors as many of the meeting requests as the facility can manage, recognizing that each is an opportunity to help the public better understand its mission and to broaden its contacts. Public affection for the program and the facility has led to generous ongoing contributions, continuing publicity and an expanded referral base. By offering its physical space and philosophy of care as a flourishing resource to its larger community, Willson Hospice is enhancing the quality of life for its entire region.

Ila Burdette, AIA, LEED AP BD+C and Amy Sickeler, RID, LEED AP ID+C are principals at Perkins+Will's Atlanta office. They can be reached at ila.burdette@perkinswill.com and amy.sickeler@perkinswill.com.

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