

# Creative Responses To Community Need

BY RHODA WEISS

**A**lthough a well-defined mission is critical to hospitals' ability to serve their community, it is not enough. Providers must also have the vision to see needs that others may have overlooked and the ingenuity and resources to respond to them effectively. This column describes two hospitals' creative responses to the special needs of their patients and communities.

## COMMUNITY PARK

Because urban hospitals are often the largest property owners in their neighborhoods, any major change in the appearance, size, or function of their campus will likely prompt a reaction from the surrounding community. Frequently, the reaction is adverse, particularly if plans involve acquisition and razing of private property, new construction, or changes in traffic flow.

But this does not have to be the case. By involving local government and neighborhood groups as active participants in the campus planning process, a healthcare provider can take the lead in revitalizing its neighborhood and benefiting its larger community, while building community partnerships so important in this era of healthcare reform.

Such is the case at St. Anthony's Hospital, a 427-bed community hospital located near downtown St. Petersburg, FL.

In November 1993 the hospital officially opened St. Anthony's Community Park. The park includes a tree-lined boulevard surrounded by two acres of open green space for community recreation, a children's playground, a large gazebo for group gatherings, and an ecumenical meditation area for quiet reflection.

Lauded by the media and civic leaders, the community park opening was marked by a three-day celebration that included a community "block" party, an outdoor Mass, and a reception for government and civic leaders. More than 10,000 people attended the weekend event.

The creation of St. Anthony's Community Park was the result of three years of collaboration



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between the hospital, the city of St. Petersburg, and the Uptown Neighborhood Association. The groups developed an action plan to create more green spaces and recreational areas, promote safety, enhance the quality of life in the neighborhood, and increase public access to the hospital's facilities. After much discussion, the park concept evolved, and St. Anthony's incorporated it into its master campus plan.

Because the community park was designed to be a center of activities and events for hospital employees and patients, as well as the neighborhood and community, it was supported enthusiastically by the hospital's "family" of employees, volunteers, physicians, and donors. Bake sales, flea markets, and other events staged by hospital departments generated more than \$25,000 in contributions. In addition, the hospital's foundation spearheaded a community fundraising campaign that drew an enthusiastic response from individual donors.

St. Petersburg Mayor David Fischer sees the partnership between St. Anthony's and the com-

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More than 10,000 people attended the three-day celebration marking the park's opening.

## [Leader]

► CHA's study "Transformational Leadership for the Healing Ministry: Competencies for the Future" has identified the characteristics of outstanding leaders in Catholic healthcare. Executives, trustees, and sponsors will find the results of this research project invaluable in planning for, surviving, and thriving in an unpredictable future. The results of this important study, conducted for CHA's Center for Leadership Excellence, will be released at the 79th Annual Catholic Health Assembly, June 5-8, 1994, in Philadelphia. The findings will be published in the June issue of *Health Progress*.



munity as a model for what can be accomplished through collaboration. "This project is a great concept that we hope we will be able to duplicate in other areas of the city," he says.

The hospital, which has become the neighborhood association's official corporate sponsor, also recently purchased a bicycle for the neighborhood's community police officer. Hospital staffers regularly attend neighborhood association meetings.

St. Anthony's President and Chief Executive Officer Barbara Donaho has committed to making the partnership a lasting one. "We believe in being a good neighbor and corporate citizen, but another important fruit of this collaboration will be the lasting friendships we have built with our neighbors and city officials," she said.

### **PETE'S PLAYGROUND**

A child's short time on earth inspired countless New Mexicans to help hundreds of other children have a safe, outdoor environment in which to enjoy the state's sunshine and fresh air.

In 1992 University Hospital/Children's Hospital, Albuquerque, dedicated Pete's Playground—a rooftop play area. "Being hospitalized is traumatic enough for children," explains Annie Olson, the hospital's public relations director. "But having no access to extended outdoor play is even worse."

Hospital staff conceived the playground idea in the mid-1980s. But it was "Pete," a boy with many congenital problems who spent more than three years at the hospital until his death, who was the catalyst for staff to make the playground a reality.

Memorial gifts from his death generated more than \$10,000 in seed money for the play area. With these funds and the commitment of the boy's parents, a task force began work on attracting support for construction.

Volunteers contributed more than 46,000 hours to the project, and fundraising events and corporate and public school programs helped fund it. Today the playground continues to be a source of freedom and independence for critically ill children. □