

# CHRISTUS HEALTH DESIGNS WITH MISSION IN MIND

## *Work Spaces Focus on Values — and Associates*

In May 2011, CHRISTUS Health announced its decision to consolidate and relocate its headquarters by June 2013 to Irving, Texas. I had the opportunity to visit the new headquarters in January, the week after the building was blessed and dedicated.



BRIAN SMITH

We are accustomed to hearing about and seeing beautiful, healing places designed and constructed for our patients. In this column, I will highlight the thoughtful process that went into the design and holistic approach to creating a work environment for the CHRISTUS staff.

The mission, core values and heritage of the sponsoring congregations are evident the moment you walk into the new CHRISTUS Health building and as you walk each of its six floors. For insight about the new headquarters and what it is like to work there, I talked with a number of people. I quote some by name, but where I do not, the responses reflect views offered by this group of collaborators, whom I thank: Gerry Heeley, senior vice president, mission integration and leadership formation; Deborah Simmen, system director of mission initiatives; and Abby McNeil, system director, communications and public affairs.

**HEALTH PROGRESS:** Briefly describe what went into the discernment process to consolidate CHRISTUS Health's corporate offices into one Texas location. Who were the key stakeholders? What were the major issues?

**CHRISTUS HEALTH:** We used a task force of executive leaders, board members and representatives from our sponsoring congregations to research and recommend a central location for the new headquarters based on a number of factors, such as cost, quality of life, transportation, health care, etc. After months of analysis and discernment using our values-based decision-making and due-diligence processes, the Dallas area proved to be the best choice for our ministry.

With this move, we wanted to “build one CHRISTUS community at our system level, driven by a strong, thriving, unified culture of service, simplicity and accountability,” said Ernie Sadau, president and CEO of CHRISTUS Health. “Locating all of the system services and associates in one location allows us to work together more effectively and make quicker decisions as we lead and respond to industry changes.”

It was also an important stewardship action. Consolidation will drive costs out of the system and increase the value the system provides to our patient care ministries and, ultimately, to the patients and communities we serve. This will help us sustain our financial health so we can continue our mission to extend the healing ministry of Jesus Christ.

Overall, we expect to save more than \$60 million over the course of 10 years by making the move. The anticipated cost saving was measured through consolidation of office space, reduction in travel and centralization of services at the system level. Consolidating system services from three offices (San Antonio, Houston and Irving) into one office will achieve most of the savings; however, centralizing regional functions and expanding system services will also help to decrease redundancy and increase savings.

**HP:** What factors were considered when the new space was being designed?

**CHRISTUS:** “From the beginning, the task force and design team understood that we had the unique opportunity to create a truly holistic work space that would support the heritage and spirituality of CHRISTUS Health and the physical, mental and spiritual needs of our associates,” said Gerry Heeley. “To this end, decisions regarding layout, use of space, décor, environment and functionality were guided by the mission and core values.”

For example, the building's 1st floor reception area became home to the CHRISTUS Health Heritage Center and the Christ the Healer Chapel, named after its original oil-on-canvas triptych, painted by artist Daniel Bonnell.

"We wanted everyone who walked through our doors to know that they had entered a unique space," Heeley said. "We were intentional in creating a living heritage center that shares both the past and present stories of CHRISTUS Health and celebrates the rich legacy of our sponsoring congregations, The Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word of Houston and of San Antonio."

On each of the other five floors is a staff "reflection room" to encourage and support the spirituality of CHRISTUS associates. "Again, we were very thoughtful in our plan to provide time and space for prayer and reflection throughout the building," said Heeley. "We utilized the sacred art of Daniel Bonnell to visually communicate the Scriptural healing stories in each of the reflection rooms as well as other places throughout the building. We made the most of every opportunity to surround our associates and guests with symbols and artistic reminders of the heritage, spirituality and core values of CHRISTUS Health."

CHRISTUS believes in work-life balance and in providing a holistic — mind, body, spirit — environment for all associates, so work went into incorporating these beliefs into the new headquarters building and its culture.

To inspire the mind, we used "green-friendly" building materials to create an open, collabora-

**"We made the most of every opportunity to surround our associates and guests with symbols and artistic reminders of the heritage, spirituality and core values of CHRISTUS Health."**

— Gerry Heeley

tive environment with natural light available in all work areas. To attend to needs of the body, we included an on-site fitness center, a healthy cafe and healthy vending machines and an on-site primary care clinic for associates and their families. To care for the spirit, we have the five reflection rooms, the chapel and heritage center to honor our sponsoring congregations and a variety of

prayer services which all associates may attend. We want to care for our associates as we do for our patients — recognizing the whole person, mind, body and spirit.

All meeting rooms are named after cities where our facilities are located, and all of our associates' break areas, which we call "parks," have images on the walls that represent the communities our regions serve. These images help remind our associates who work in Irving that their ministry is to support the regions and facilities where patient care is provided.

Additionally, in the elevator lobby on each floor, there is a core value displayed on the wall with a corresponding Scripture. These core values — dignity, integrity, excellence, compassion and stewardship — help serve as daily reminders of the way we are to approach our work together. By adding these visible reminders, we hope our associates, who are several steps removed from the patient, are able to see the contribution they make to the healing ministry of Jesus.

**HP:** Who were the CHRISTUS leaders involved in the design and selection of art, décor, furniture, etc.? What criteria did they use to make selections?

**CHRISTUS:** Heeley led a group that included representatives from the sponsoring congregations to design the heritage space, chapel, reflection rooms and artwork for the building. Linda McClung, senior vice president and chief administrative officer, led a team to determine the building's design and décor. The goal was to create a space that was open and encouraged collaboration, but that also allowed for concentration and reflection.

"The opportunity to design and build out a ministry headquarters from scratch provided us with the unique chance to make the environment reflective of and in support of the culture we wanted to reinforce and build," McClung said. "From the layout to the materials to the office design to the decorations — it was planned to reinforce our culture of trust, commitment to our heritage and collaboration. It was also important that the design honor our heritage and support a sense of community and spirituality. Simplicity and energy efficiency were also taken into consideration."

**HP:** What kinds of departments and functions of CHRISTUS Health are located in Irving? De-

**People spend most of their time sitting at desks or conference tables, so it was important to provide healthy food, opportunities to exercise and space for reflection.**

scribe the feelings of associates who have moved into the new facility.

**CHRISTUS:** Most of the positions in the new system office are administrative and have system support functions. They include such departments as information management and technology; risk management; community benefits; mission and ethics; compliance; health informatics; finance and the like. People spend most of their time sitting at desks or conference tables, so it was important to provide healthy food, opportunities to exercise and space for reflection. This kind of attention to creating an associate-focused environment and culture not only makes good business sense in terms of wellness and job satisfaction, but it also exemplifies the CHRISTUS core values and demonstrates to associates that the health system wants to reflect those values to the people who work there.

At first, many of the associates who relocated from other cities had mixed feelings. There are now 800 staff members in the new space — by the end of 2013 there will be 1,000 — and we are hearing positive feedback about the amount of attention focused on associates' well-being. Many say they have more interaction with their fellow associates in the new headquarters than they expected. The creativity and energy in this place inspires them to excellence, and the opportunities and spaces for reflection prove that we mean what we say, that CHRISTUS is committed to our mission to extend the healing ministry of Jesus Christ wherever we are in the world.

The associates love the healthy meals served in the café and the healthy snack options available through vending machines. The fitness center is popular and well utilized. The associates have an activities council to encourage active and healthy living, and it has put together a running/walking club, softball team, kickball team and other assorted fun events to build community, incorporate friends and family and support a balanced lifestyle.

A big source of satisfaction is the on-site primary care clinic for staff members and their families, not to mention the opportunity it provides to arrange appointments around the associate's work schedule.

**HP:** What has been the reaction of the sponsoring congregations, Bishop Kevin J. Farrell of the Catholic Diocese of Dallas and visitors who have come to the headquarters?

**CHRISTUS:** Overwhelmingly positive. The bishop led the dedication service for the new building and was delighted by the Heritage Center and the chapel. In fact, both spaces have gained an unexpected but very positive amount of interest and response. They clearly communicate CHRISTUS Health's Catholic identity, mission and spirituality in a very inviting and appealing way.

Our sponsoring congregations, the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word (Houston and San Antonio), were instrumental in sharing their archives and are extremely pleased with the Heritage Center. Associates, guests and even a few potential job candidates have asked if they can bring family and friends to view the center and exhibits. Many of our leaders use the images and stories communicated throughout the space to communicate the unique spirit and culture of CHRISTUS Health.

**Brian P. Smith, M.S., M.A., M.Div.,** is senior director of mission integration and leadership formation, the Catholic Health Association, St. Louis. Contact him at [bsmith@chausa.org](mailto:bsmith@chausa.org).

JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

[www.chausa.org](http://www.chausa.org)

# HEALTH PROGRESS®

---

Reprinted from *Health Progress*, July-August 2013  
Copyright © 2013 by The Catholic Health Association of the United States

---