





ST. FRANCIS MEDICAL CENTER

NEW URBANISM DRIVES HOSPITAL SITE PLAN

BY PETER J. BERNARD

When I joined the Bon Secours Health System in Richmond, Va., in the summer of 2000, I became involved in the design and construction of a new hospital campus. As the son of an architect and builder, I saw how buildings can transform a community, and I understand how poorly designed or neglected structures can discourage interaction and drain a community's confidence. Well-designed buildings go beyond being functional; they can reinforce neighborhoods, instill pride and create a sense of place.

Bon Secours Health System has a long tradition of knitting communities together through service. Our mission, to be "good help to those in need," dates back to 1824 when the Sisters of Bon Secours began visiting the homes of the sick and dying in Paris. They engaged their neighbors on their own terms, recognizing and responding to individual and collective community needs.

Just as the new St. Francis Medical Center in Richmond responded to a need in the community for health services, we challenged ourselves to ensure it also reflected the commitment of the Sisters of Bon Secours to provide help and healing, while also being good neighbors and careful stewards of our environment. Consistent with our vision to be a world-class, integrated health care delivery network, we didn't intend to just meet the immediate needs of the community — we looked forward to how the hospital could serve this community for generations to come.

When we considered how to best reflect this mission at St. Francis, we began to see our hospital through the eyes of our patients. So often when

people enter a hospital, they are filled with concern, struggling with pain. We wanted to ameliorate some of their anxiety by providing a place of beauty and serenity. We sought to reflect in stone and steel what the Sisters of Bon Secours personify: help and healing. Throughout our St. Francis facility, we try to convey, "You are our neighbor and we care about you. Our goal is to restore you to health and wholeness."

CREATING A DESTINATION

If St. Francis had looked like just another functional building in a business park surrounded by a sea of parking, we would have fallen well short of our objectives. Instead, the design of the community's first new hospital in more than 20 years interwove community pride, state-of-the-art medical and surgical services and our mission with the concepts of evidence-based design and New Urbanism. Situated on 75 acres outside of Richmond, the medical center's buildings are tied together by an architectural style chosen to honor St. Francis of Assisi, the beloved mystic born in

The St. Francis belltower, or campanile, serves as a local landmark. Photos courtesy of Bon Secours Richmond Health System.



The two-story St. Clare Chapel features a starry sky painted on the ceiling to draw the eye up.

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levard provides a sense that you are headed for a destination, a special place. A bell tower, known as a campanile, stands at the corner of the entry plaza. Reminiscent of the belltower of the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, it serves as a landmark for the area, but it also provides a cornerstone for the hospital's culture. Each time a baby is born at the hospital, the bells of the campanile ring.

New Urbanism and evidenced-based design harmonize well with the Sisters of Bon Secours' dedication to healing and community. Along the way, our focus on mission has affected all those who worked on the planning, design and creation of St. Francis. When you believe in a mission as we do, it affects the hearts and minds of all those involved, for they realize this is a shared commitment and not just business as usual. It transforms everyone who becomes a part of the process. In this case, the very act of building is itself a calling to mission.

DESIGNED FOR HEALING

While the St. Francis Medical Center campus design reaches out into the community, the interior of the hospital also exemplifies compassionate care for our neighbors. When visitors enter St. Francis' four-story atrium, they are surrounded by light, flowing water and open space. Light-filled spaces and calming art create an atmosphere that goes far beyond the traditional health care setting.

A beautiful painting creates a centerpiece for the lobby. The nationally recognized artist, Dan Bartges, infused the dynamic 6-by-10-foot masterpiece that welcomes our guests with his personal experiences of the Umbrian countryside.

A pair of two-story waterfalls creates another dramatic element. The water features flank the entrance to the chapel, which stands at the heart of the hospital. The St. Clare Chapel, with its two-story cylindrical space, displays art glass with designs depicting St. Francis and St. Clare, one of St. Francis's first followers. The star-filled night sky painted on the ceiling draws eyes heav-

that city, in the Umbria region of Italy, in 1182. The 130-private-patient-room hospital and six all-digital surgical suites are joined on the campus by two medical office buildings and a daycare center. The terra-cotta tiled roofs stylistically link the different components of the campus, and the grounds of the medical center reflect the spirit of its namesake, who was known for his simplicity of style and a focus of living lightly on the land.

The boulevard that leads to St. Francis Medical Center will eventually be lined with buildings that point the way to the hospital, which has become a focal point for our community. The bou-

enward. A second-floor balcony allows guests in wheelchairs or beds to participate in services or to visit for prayer and meditation. The capitals of the pillars in the chapel suggest the fleur-de-lis, a reminder of the heritage of the Sisters of Bon Secours in France.

The chapel opens to a series of walking paths and meditative gardens visible from the hospital. By bringing beauty and light into each patient room, we hoped to facilitate a spiritual experience for our guests. We believe the natural light streaming into these rooms has the added benefit of enhancing healing and shortening hospital stays, and we have commissioned a study to document these effects. The sylvan grounds, complete with plants of seasonal interest, provide a tranquil environment for both patients and employees. Public spaces throughout the hospital incorporate nature. The St. Francis café offers outdoor seating and views of the gardens. The hospital's education facilities rest on the ground level, and

the windows drink in the light and allow views to enhance the learning experience.

Along with the reflection pond and nature trails, we also are planning to add a labyrinth. Labyrinths are increasingly incorporated in healing environments, as they symbolize the patient's journey toward healing and wholeness.

HEALING WATERS

We have used natural elements to not only support the built environment but also to reinforce the medical center's spirituality. Water, which symbolizes life and healing, flows in fountains throughout the St. Francis campus. At the opening of the hospital, waters from the River Jordan, the Seine River in Paris (where the Sisters of Bon Secours began their ministry) and rivers in Central Virginia and Maryland (the home of Bon Secours Health System, Inc.) were poured into the main fountain at the entrance to represent the many facets of Bon Secours.



Located in the hospital lobby, this painting depicts artist Dan Bartges' impression of the Umbrian countryside where St. Francis of Assisi was born.

Coins tossed into the campus fountains provide funds for our St. Francis Care Fund to support patients and families. When the facilities team first cleaned out the fountain change in 2006, it had collected more than \$700. In spring 2008, the fountains poured forth another \$1,300 — just another way the St. Francis environment fosters the spirit of giving and compassion.

At Bon Secours, we ask our employees to join with us in ministry and respond to the “call to serve.” We know that employees who are con-

nected to their work, who believe in the mission of their organization, provide superior care to our patients. Whenever a new employee joins St. Francis, that individual empties water into the fountain to symbolize pouring his or her gifts into the service of the Bon Secours mission. When employee engagement at St. Francis and Bon Secours reached the Gallup 99th percentile of surveyed hospitals and health systems last year, we celebrated how deeply our employees have connected with the spirit of St. Francis and our mission of service.



Flowing water is a theme throughout the medical center and its grounds.

A PLACE TO GROW

Because of this commitment to mission and its impact on every aspect of St. Francis, including its design, St. Francis has quickly become beloved by those who live in the Richmond area. In fact, the hospital’s success has already led to the need to expand.

In January 2009, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, dean of the University of Miami School of Architecture, led a charrette for us to plan for this growth. Plater-Zyberk is a founding principal of Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company, internationally known as a leading proponent of traditional town planning and New Urbanism. (See interview in Press Conference, p. 43.) A charrette is a holistic, collabora-



The prayer gardens at St. Francis continue the architectural themes that unify the 75-acre campus.

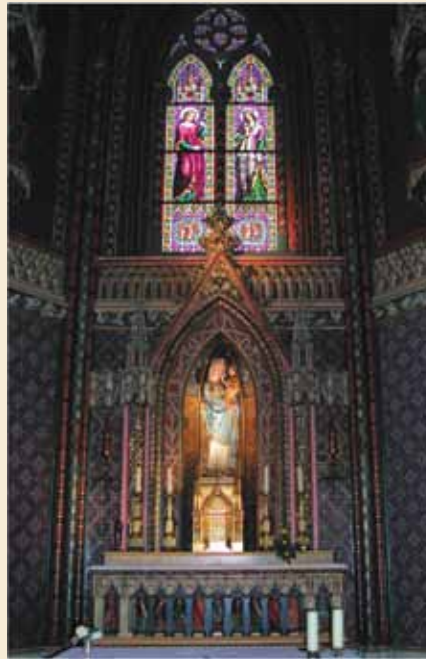
tive planning process, one that harnessed the talents and energies of all interested parties to create and support a long-term vision of our facility.

With hundreds of Bon Secours employees, civic leaders, architects, planners and community decision makers, we spent a week in an intensive planning session. This meant that everyone — neighbors, elected officials, government agency representatives, EMS crews, patients, volunteers, physicians, nurses, maintenance workers, housekeepers and administrators — had the opportunity to bring their diverse perspectives. From this process, we further developed plans for supporting a community around St. Francis.

The site plan supports our main goals of environmental responsibility, social integration and economic sustainability. Everything has been designed to uphold our mission of healing, spirituality and nature. Additionally, the plan encompasses five important principles of good neighborhood design: creating a center and an edge; locating key services and buildings within a quarter-mile radius and a five-minute walk; providing a mix of uses, from hospital and medical services to residences and retail conveniences; a street network for pedestrian comfort; and focal civic places, including churches and schools.

St. Francis has quickly emerged as a highlighting design within the Bon Secours system, the spirit of which we actively seek to replicate at each of our facilities. This work is guided by a multidisciplinary team of designers, architects, mission leaders and executives, known as the Spiritual Environment Council, who meet quarterly to consider opportunities to extend the principles of spiritual environmental design employed at St. Francis to the other Bon Secours facilities. This group has been instrumental in creating places of hope and healing across our system and ensuring that the elements of nature, faith and beauty present at St. Francis are present everywhere our patients and employees visit.

One of the most beautiful facilities in Chesterfield County, Va., St. Francis has reclaimed a tradition of hospitals enriching civic life and serving communities. This dovetails with the goals of New Urbanism, which has been described as the “revival of place-making.” At St. Francis Medical Center we are place-making on a number of levels. We are often heard saying that we are a place that makes room for miracles.



CONTINUING THE SPIRIT OF THE SISTERS OF BON SECOURS

Mère Geay ... was strict towards herself and concerned that the spirit of poverty of the early days be preserved among her Sisters, yet she wanted to make the Lord's house magnificent; she was often heard to say, “Let us be poor in everything, but let God be treated as God.” (*Que vous soyons pauvres en tout, mai que Dieu soit traité en Dieu.*)

— *History of the Congregation: Sisters of Bon Secours de Paris. Photo of chapel, Mother House, Paris, France, January 2005*

For our smallest patients, St. Francis provides a place to begin their stories. For others, it is a place to say goodbye. Whatever the journey, we offer world-class care in a facility that both reflects and fulfills our mission of good help.

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