

Chicago civic groups contribute art to Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital

By Heather Lalley



Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

Photo: Nicole Radja

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Lisa Mulvaney, coordinator of the creative arts program at the soon-to-open Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital, says one of her favorite comments about the new space came from a teen who had an advance tour. "This looks more like a children's museum than a children's hospital," the girl, 15, said.

Few statements could've better pleased Mulvaney, who worked with Chicago-area civic organizations to design inviting, thought-provoking art installations on the 23 floors of the Streeterville hospital formerly known as Children's Memorial in Lincoln Park. "We want to create an environment that doesn't feel like a hospital," she says of the collaboration with groups such as the Art Institute of Chicago, Redmoon Theater, Lincoln Park Zoo and nearly 20 others. "Our goal is to create healing spaces," Mulvaney says, adding that the intention is for the artwork to provide psychological and spiritual comfort. The new hospital is home to thousands of pieces of art, including giant whale sculptures from the Shedd Aquarium and framed photos of Joffrey Ballet dancers. There's a cab from a Chicago fire truck and a light-up constellation from the Adler Planetarium, plus images of tulips, water lilies and swans from the Chicago Botanic Garden and a mosaic of Chicago made up of 15 flat-screen TVs from the Chicago Cultural Alliance. All contribute to a running theme of hometown pride and exploration, according to Mulvaney. "Part of what makes Chicago so special is all of the incredible cultural institutions and the incredible diversity," she says, noting the hospital's intention to reflect that.

For the 15th floor cardiac care unit, Katherine Ross and Karen Zissis of Irving Park's Kinc Design and Fabrication, a company that specializes in custom props, murals and theatrical scenery, spent nearly 18 months collaborating with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Lookingglass Theatre on an elaborate reimagination of Peter and the Wolf. "Kids will be up there up to a year," says Ross, who had carpenters assemble large murals, climbing structures and discovery boxes that hold theatrical masks and props. "We wanted the artwork on the floor to sustain them. If you're there for a day, it'll engage you. If you're there for six months, it'll engage you."

The designers worked with CSO musicians and Lookingglass performers to interpret the story as art. Instead of a wolf (which could scare young patients), Kinc's version tells the classic story with a boy and a dog. Patients will be encouraged to go on

scavenger hunts to find hidden items worked into the design and to use the artwork as a springboard for their own writing and art.

Ross and Zissis originally hoped to create interactive installations, but disease-control restrictions at the hospital shut those plans down. No moving parts are allowed, and all of the pieces must be able to be sanitized regularly. But the complexity and scale of the project, which stretches throughout the entire cardiac floor, is impressive, Ross said.

“Our idea is immersion,” she said. “We want to really get [patients] into this world and out of the world [they’re] in.”

Children’s Memorial Hospital moves to 225 East Chicago Avenue and opens as the Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital on June 9. Go to childrensmemorial.org/newhospital for more info.

The new hospital at a glance

- At 23 stories, it’s the world’s tallest pediatric hospital.
- Total price tag: \$855 million.
- It covers 1.25 million square feet.
- Emergency room capacity is 45 beds, up from 25.
- The building is constructed with low-emission materials to reduce water and energy usage.
- All 288 patient rooms are private.
- Sleeping rooms, in-room showers, Wi-Fi, playrooms, a 5,000-square-foot outdoor garden, kitchens and dining rooms are available for families.

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