

## Diamond Children's Medical Center: Child's Play

OCTOBER 1, 2010 ERICA GARVIII



Vicki Began, vice president of women's, children's, and emergency services

There's no place like home. Every child understands that, especially after spending time in a hospital due to illnesses. Although **Diamond Children's Medical Center (DCMC)** cannot replicate all the comforts of home, Vicki Began believes it can provide an atmosphere that's as imaginative and peaceful as it is healing.



"This center is a gem to the communities of Tucson and Southern Arizona," said Vicki Began, vice president of women's, children's, and emergency services. "It's not just a medical facility for children to receive treatment—it's also a play world where kids can remember what it is to be kids."

DCMC is the newest part of a \$200 million expansion project of the University Medical Center (UMC) in Tucson, Ariz. Five years ago, Fayev Ghishan, department head of UMC and head of The Steele Foundation Research Center, urged UMC's board to build the new center. This idea was 15 years in the making, and the community of Tucson was finally ready for it, Began said. The \$55 million children's medical center received its lead donation of \$15 million from Joan and Donald Diamond and celebrated its grand opening in September.

The playful atmosphere of DCMC was created from the collaborative efforts of NTD Architecture as well as construction company Kitchell Corp. and theme design company Studio Productions. The journey begins outside with the center's inspiration garden, a space where patients and their families can congregate and relax outdoors.

"That was something parents requested," said Began. "They wanted a space where they could let their children play and breathe the fresh air of the outdoors. In fact, nature was the theme we chose for all the elements of DCMC. Nature resonates with everyone in a harmonious way; it's timeless, ageless, and peaceful."



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Upon entering the medical center through its glass lobby doors, visitors are greeted by the sights and sounds of childhood. Soothing colors create warmth, and a toy train (donated by Tucson Garden Rail Road Society) travels through the lobby and into the center's gift shop—also known as The Toy Store. Artwork depicting Tucson landscapes adorn the walls, and children can experience the sights and sounds of nature on the interactive wall created by EyeClick.

"It's the hit of the lobby; I saw a little two year old glued to the wall for nearly 10 minutes," said Began. "It's exactly what we wanted to achieve with this new center. We wanted to provide a place where children can be engaged in activities and have healthy distractions."

The center's other amenities include a children's library, a classroom, an outdoor stage, a teen lounge, a Route66 Café, and a meditation room. Began said the physicians were impressed by the center's inclusion of a holistic space for parents and children to meditate and pray.

That comfort is carried into the patient areas. Began said the center's private rooms were designed to accommodate the needs of both the patients and their families. Each space is equipped with amenities like a loveseat/pullout bed and a private full bathroom.

"When I think about our new rooms, there is a story that stays with me I will never forget," said Began. "A little boy, who has since recovered from cancer, told us during his treatments it was important to him that his brother stay here overnight. The new center gives us the opportunity to grant those wishes. We have made it possible for loved ones to have everything they need so they never have to leave a child's bedside."

Similarly, the new center has improved DCMC's NICU. The facility includes nesting rooms for parents, allowing families to simulate a home environment before caring for their children at home. It also has family sleeping units. Began said the 36-bed space is triple the size of the original NICU.

"The new space has made a huge difference by providing much more room for doctors and nurses," said Began. "The unit feels different now; it's surprisingly calm and quiet."

### **A caring culture**

Began said the new atmosphere more accurately reflects the compassion and quality of the physicians and staff members. DCMC's partnership with the University College of Medicine and The University of Arizona Steele Children's Research Center attracts a lot of dedicated pediatric physicians to the Tucson area.

"You have the best and the brightest all right here because of our outstanding partnerships," said Began. "We have a lot of specialists and subspecialists in pediatrics wanting to learn here and practice here. It's that bench-to-bedside research that can help bring real progress to treating and curing childhood illnesses."

That collaborative, interdisciplinary partnership DCMC has thrived from is a part of its patient treatment practices. Began said the doctors not only partner with each other but also with the parents of patients to provide the best care possible. Began said a team of physicians will meet with the parents and openly discuss the procedures and progress of treatment.

"The parents have to be part of that collective voice," said Began. "They are the experts on their child. That's why it's so important to make them a part of the treatment process. That's what family-centered care is all about."

Began said that the center's staff members take their jobs very seriously, as they are aware of the profound impact their work has on the community it serves. Without the due diligence of its employees, the center would not be what it has become.

"They are an outstanding group of individuals to work with," said Began. "To watch our children get better is so important, and they do a great job in contributing to that purpose. It's important to everyone working here that we are making a difference in the lives of children and their families."

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