



Light and bright, the new Children's Hospital cheers patients and their families.

healing through design

When Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC opened its doors in Lawrenceville, it not only raised the bar on hospitals, but it ushered in a new era in architecture suggesting that thoughtful design could encourage healing and transformation.

When the 1.4-million-square-foot campus was completed in 2009 after a seven-year process, Children's emerged as a centerpiece for the community and region, a colorful structure with whimsical flair. Once inside, visitors find bright spaces filled with natural light, lit up with playful hues of grape, lime, tangerine and lemon. Art is everywhere—murals, sculpture, mobiles—even in the staggering display of eclectic lighting.

Many of the creative details were the work of two Mt. Lebanon residents, Tim Powers, Longuevue Drive, and Sandy Wasik, MacArthur Drive, technical artists who are largely responsible

for the hospital's recent designation by Soliant Health, a national health care staffing company, as one of the 10 most beautiful in the world. Powers, senior vice president of Astorino, was the principal architect in charge of the project; Wasik was the lead designer. Together with the Astorino team, the two led the way on many of the beautiful—and nurturing—details found in the lobbies, hallways, cafeterias and patient suites. In fact, they've worked together as a team on nearly all the major hospital projects in Pittsburgh, from Magee-Women's to Allegheny General and St. Clair Hospital's Cancer Center.

"It was definitely the defining project of my career," says Wasik, who compares the process to the drawn-out anticipation of a birth followed by separation anxiety. Wasik, who graduated with a degree in interior design from LaRoche College, has been a professional in the field for 31 years.

One of the more interesting (and not as well publicized)



Above: From the inside of the hospital, a view of the bridge that connects the hospital with the Faculty Pavilion shows how the use of bright colors and natural light keeps the building from feeling institutional.

Right: Designer Sandy Wasik and architect Tim Powers, both Mt. Lebanon residents, collaborated on the colorful design for the new hospital in Lawrenceville.



aspects of the Children's Hospital project was the pioneering research behind many of the design decisions. Astorino developed a process it calls "research driven design," conducting hours of detailed interviews with patients, staff and families who shared their stories and concerns about the Oakland hospital and a wish list for the new campus.

This is significant because architects and designers based major decisions on scientific evidence that came out of the baseline study, says Powers. As a result, architects and designers had an understanding of how people actually felt about the old hospital. Six months of research was distilled into objectives that were carefully analyzed and worked into the smallest details of the overall design.

Having spent time in the dark, cramped and uninviting Oakland space, many pined for a dramatic change. The biggest takeaway was people wanted their lives to be transformed

through the process of healing, Powers says. As a result, the theme of the project became one of transformation.

"In college I realized that architecture was more than parts and pieces; it's a whole idea that can influence people's emotional condition and their state of mind," he says. "We believe the effect of our work can have a positive influence on the healing of patients. It gave us, as designers, a much deeper connection with those for whom we were designing the building."

The process is considered standard operating procedure for many architects today, he adds.

It helped, of course, that Children's was built on years of recognized success and accomplishment. Despite the physical constraints of the Oakland campus, it has been consistently ranked one of the best pediatric hospitals in the country for years by *U.S. News & World Report*, receiving the accolade again this year.

This gives the region a world-class facility to match, a \$625



Powers and Wasik stand before the magenta and lime hues of the Transformation Corridor. Their designs were based on hours of interviews with patients, families and staff about their opinions on the old building and their hopes for the new one.

million, state-of-the-art campus with two LEED-certified buildings, nine floors with a rooftop healing garden for patients, 296 beds featuring private rooms with comfortable, custom-made trundles (designed by Wasik) for sleepover parents, fitness centers and a 20,000 square-foot family resource and activity center, among the largest of its kind anywhere.

Walking the hallways with the designers reminds them of the stories behind many of the decisions they've made along the way. One of Powers' favorites is the pedestrian walkway that connects the faculty pavilion with the John G. Rangos Sr. Research Center, which has a Slinky-like feel with interior spirals and ramps. It was inspired by Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, which he read to his children when they were growing up.

For Wasik it is the personal bond with the physical structure that has been expressed by the children. During a tour of the hospital, her young daughter was in awe that her mother had helped to create such an appealing wonderland for children. Another day, Wasik watched as a young patient physically hugged one of the purple columns as a way of saying goodbye.

"Children react in ways you don't expect," she says. "I've designed for adults my whole life. To design for children is just so rewarding."

On another note, do their homes in Mt. Lebanon reflect this meticulous eye for detail? Both laugh.

Powers lives in a 1920s English Tudor where he and his wife, Carolyn, have raised their four children, ranging in ages from 14 to 22. The home had three bedrooms when they purchased it in 1986. When sharing bedrooms and one bathroom became

unbearable, Powers pulled out his pencil and went to work.

"Sandy and I are lighting freaks," he says without a bit of apology. "We have 23 light fixtures in our new addition, dimmers everywhere. It drives my wife crazy. She'll say to friends, let me show you the OR (the master bathroom)."

Wasik, a single mom who moved to Mt. Lebanon from the South Side to raise her daughter, now 8, came to Mt. Lebanon primarily for the walking school district. The first thing she did after she bought her house, a 1950s ranch, was change every light fixture in the place. (These are people who actually count their lighting fixtures. She has 17.)

Both love living in Mt. Lebanon. Powers, who grew up in Media, Pennsylvania, loves to bike with his wife and enjoys the urban feel of the community. His favorite local activity is pedaling through the back corners and quiet neighborhoods, his own version of a mini retreat. Wasik enjoys the parks and library with her daughter and appreciates uptown Mt. Lebanon.

Both are committed to the region, from the Pittsburgh sports teams to the city's rising status as a place for world-class companies, architecture and design.

"We vowed this would be a Children's Hospital for Pittsburgh, so it was important for us to connect the people in the building with the community of Pittsburgh. At every turn, you'll find vistas and reminders of where you are," says Powers. "There's an overwhelming acceptance that our work has had an impact on people's lives." 📍

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