

An Investment in Community

Sponsor: Memorial Hospital and Health System

Location: South Bend, IN

McGaw Prize winner Memorial Hospital and Health System of South Bend answers the call.

It all started at a 1993 board retreat, when futurist Leland Kaiser challenged Memorial Hospital and Health System of South Bend, Ind., to tithe--to give 10 percent of its budget surplus for community programs. Kaiser's challenge was a surprise, but one the board was willing to take on, says Philip Newbold, system president and CEO. Since that retreat, Memorial has invested \$20million in nearly 100 community programs. This year's winner of the Foster G. McGaw prize, Memorial Hospital will receive a \$100,000award. The prize is sponsored by the American Hospital Association; Baxter International Foundation, Deerfield, Ill.; and Cardinal Health Foundation, Dublin, Ohio.

While Memorial was involved in community service before it started tithing, Newbold calls the practice "an accelerator" to a healthier community. For one thing, it inspires other potential donors. "If you have the resources and you don't contribute, who else will want to?" Newbold asks.

The tithing money must go beyond the walls of the hospital. "Health is created in decisions people make every day, so if you want to affect that, you have to get out into the community," Newbold says. Memorial embodies that mission in some unusual ways: a children's health museum, self-help groups for seniors and an enrichment program for homeless toddlers. Memorial staffers even contribute sweat equity to improve a house in a run-down neighborhood near the hospital campus.

Power to the Kids

A health museum might seem an unlikely community outreach project, but there's solid logic behind it: teach children about the effects of bad choices now so that they make good decisions later. The 12,000-square-foot museum, aimed at children from kindergarten through eighth grade, caters to school visits on weekdays and families on the weekends. Since it opened in February 2000, it has hosted more than 48,000 schoolchildren, who have learned about their bodies, safety issues and healthy habits.

"We're all about empowering kids," says Rebecca Williams, R.N., director of Health Works! Kids' Museum. The place pulses with enthusiasm, authenticating Williams' title on her business card: "Visionary Potentiater of Pumped Up Kids." The excitement is evident in preschoolers, who on one recent weekday participated in friendly competition. Two children stood at podiums, Jeopardy-style, and hit a beeper when they knew the answer to a health-related question. "What's the largest organ?" a staffer shouted. "Skin!" a blond boy said, his eyes shining.

"Health Works! achieves in a minute what would take an hour in the classroom," says Mike Squint, a science curriculum developer for Niles (Mich.) Community Schools. Niles, just a few miles north of South Bend, has made Health Works! visits part of the course work for first- through sixth-graders.

Because the museum offers learning in a multi-sensory way, even students who haven't developed learning skills absorb the information, Squint says. For instance, a child can touch a healthy pair of pig's lungs, or smell stale cigarette smoke, sitting in a vented plastic chair stuffed with 37,600 cigarette butts. While reclining there, kids watch anti-smoking public service ads on a TV set. "My low readers get the same message as the more advanced students," Squint says. Although the museum has only been open two years, he's already starting to see a change in attitude. "Third-graders say to me, 'I'm eating too much junk food,' or 'I need to exercise,'" Squint says.

Newbold hopes the next project will be a mobile health exhibit geared to older youths--this time mounting a huge replica of a human brain on an AM General Hummer that sports workable body parts inside. "It's a magical way to take the Health Works! message outside the museum," Williams says.

The Most Vulnerable

Another place Memorial Hospital wants to intervene early is with homeless infants and toddlers. In the city's homeless center, occupational therapy students play with children up to 3 years old, stimulating their minds and fostering physical development. Called PEDS, for the Play, Exploration & Developmental Support Program, it has been in place since 1998. In one case, a pair of 23-month-old twins couldn't walk because their homeless mother had confined them to a stroller for safety's sake. Within a month of starting PEDS, the twin girls were on their feet and doing what toddlers do.

Homeless children are frequently developmentally delayed and malnourished, says Drew Buscareno, executive director of South Bend's Center for the Homeless. In first grade, they are often shunted off to special education. PEDS provides developmental screenings for children and educates parents about their children's health and well being. In 2001, PEDS served 50 children. All 24 parents surveyed said they noticed positive changes in their children since they began the PEDS program.

"The program goes a long way to make these kids successful in school," Buscareno says. "It's really a homelessness prevention program."

Memorial doesn't help homeless kids only; it provides medical services for adults at the Center for the Homeless, staffing a 3,000 square-foot clinic. Medical services are available for neighborhood residents and homeless center guests. The hospital also assisted in developing a landscaping maintenance business that provides jobs for the homeless and revenue for the homeless center. "Our partnership with Memorial has been transformative," Buscareno says. "It's brought mainstream resources to bear on the most vulnerable population in society."

Zestful Aging

The elderly are another vulnerable population Memorial seeks to enrich. At the Leighton Center for Senior Health, classes and activities take a holistic approach that contributes to the wellness of body, mind and spirit. "The center has a mission to break the most prevalent myth about aging: that it's a physical and mental decline and there's nothing you can do about it," says Rosemary Cox, a Leighton wellness therapist. Cox teaches an eight-week class called Adding Zest to Life, which teaches seniors how to maximize their health through diet and exercise, and tap their inner resources through assignments that

foster introspection. Memorial's research shows that seniors who completed the class have higher life satisfaction and decreased depression.

"Many older people are depressed, thinking their life is behind them," says Zest graduate Joanne K. Hill, 68. "The class helps them create new goals." Hill should know: she finished the class and went on to teach it. She also met an other longtime goal. When Hill took the class, she was struggling to write a self-help book. "The course gave me the zest to finish it," she says. Now a published author, Hill gives talks based on her book. She credits the course's exercises with getting her to set and meet deadlines and says class participants served as her support group for completing the work. "It's a highly charged group that wants to grow," Hill says. "I hope this program goes all over the United States."

Doing Is Learning

Memorial Hospital's leaders have a vision not only about what the hospital will do, but how it will do it. For instance, by finding a partner for a program, Memorial and its fellow organization can accomplish more than either could alone. And Memorial takes an active role in those partnerships. "We don't do anything by ourselves." Newbold says. "And we don't just write checks."

Newbold takes this hands-on approach literally. Memorial is a partner with the South Bend Heritage Foundation, a neighborhood improvement organization that fixes up rundown houses and sells them at affordable prices to people who might not otherwise be able to own. Memorial "adopted" one such house and more than 30 staff members have been volunteering time and energy on rehabbing it, hoping to finish by Memorial Day. Newbold has been right there among the volunteers. "He's a porch paintin' fool," jokes Ned Green, a residential construction manager at the foundation. The project gives staffers a chance to build camaraderie and connect with people who live near the hospital, Newbold says. At the same time, the staffers are creating better housing. "It's a win-win-win situation," he says.

Memorial also encourages its managers to serve on the boards of partnering entities and shares its resources with those partners. For instance, the homeless center's Buscareno is now in the year-long Creating Healthier Communities Fellowship program. If Memorial hadn't sponsored him, he couldn't have taken advantage of the opportunity. The \$20,000 cost of the fellowship, Buscareno points out, is more than his entire annual training budget.

Learning experiences, in fact, are central to Memorial's community service projects. That's how many projects start; participants go outside the hospital to learn about a problem directly. For instance, last year one so-called "plunge" focused on drug trafficking and participants took an eye-opening field trip. "It's a totally different experience to walk through a crackhouse and smell the raw sewage, than to sit in a board room and look at statistics on a sheet of paper," Newbold says. "You come out of that with partners who are ready to do something about what they have seen."

Memorial wants others--inside and outside the community—to learn from its mistakes and successes. Toward that end, it posted on its Web site, www.qualityoflife.org, narrative histories of at least 20 community programs.

But others opt for a view that's not virtual. Recently a busload from Logansport, Ind., spent a day at the system to see the children's museum. Newbold's advice: "Think outside the box. New ideas excite people and attract outside resources. Get started with something interesting." What else would you expect from the guy who wants to use an Army jeep to teach health?

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