

excerpts from

Creative Minds in Medicine

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case study

hospice of the western reserve



Ames Family Hospice House Exterior
Photo courtesy of the Hospice of the Western Reserve

living until you die

What could make a very difficult thing a little easier?

Time, perhaps. Family, friends, faith. Sunlight, a view of sky or trees. A picture or music. A comforting place, where beauty and ease conspire to free mind and spirit from their troubles.

People in crisis need solace and support. And, for most people, no doubt, their own death or the loss of a loved one is the most emotionally wrenching crisis they will ever face. Even those for whom death promises a welcome release from suffering can feel sorrow, stress, fear or loneliness as they prepare to say goodbye.

It's the mission of the nonprofit Hospice of the Western Reserve to relieve suffering, enhance comfort, and promote quality of life for those with terminal illnesses while also supporting the people who care for them. Comfort care is also available for those living with chronic illnesses who do not qualify for hospice. As the professionals at Ames Family Hospice House work to manage the symptoms and improve the comfort of their patients, they also look for every means possible to support caregivers and families. At the center of hospice and palliative care is the belief that each of us has the right to die pain-free and with dignity, and that our families and caregivers will receive the necessary support to allow us to do so.

Hospice staff members in Westlake, Ohio, think their efforts have been made immeasurably more effective by a building design.

"This is state-of-the-art. There's no place like this in the rest of the country," says

Director of Residential Services Bob Plona as he strolls through the airy, gracious Ames Family Hospice House, which opened in 2012 after seven years of fund-raising, planning and construction. He adds that the beautiful-but-homey building embodies the staff's unofficial motto that Hospice is about "*living* until you die," not "*dying* until you die."

Staff members' efforts have been made immeasurably more effective by a building design.

That's a sentiment architect Tom Mullinax believes in passionately. He's president of Hospice Design Resource, a firm based in Hilton Head, S.C., and his special focus on designing hospice facilities

such as Ames Family Hospice House – intensified by his caring for his mother in her last year of life – has made him a national expert on the subject.

The point of hospice care and of his work is to "give people the option of having the most wonderful experience anyone can have under those circumstances," Mullinax says with feeling. "It's a ministry as much as a career for me."

He strives to help people through design, seeing art as an important element in the uses of a hospice building as well as in its appearance. “Architecture is music. The fact is, you are composing an entire piece. I’ve done over 50 of these around the country now,” he notes, but Ames Family Hospice House “was unique.”

First, many people and much research were involved in the planning. Hospice of the Western Reserve did internal and external studies, says Plona, and sought input from patients and their families, hospice staff, as well as from the Ames family, the project’s main benefactors. Seven architectural firms were interviewed before Mullinax was selected to create the design, with local architectural firm Vocon chosen to collaborate on plans and construction.

Vocon helped research local building materials so that local patients would find the kinds of wood and stone they were used to, says Vocon Studio Director Julie Trott. Plona notes that Jay Ames, the family matriarch, chose the soft, natural blue, green and gold color scheme for the building’s interiors. Green, indeed – the entire project is a model of environmental practices.

After two years of discussions during which Mullinax says he asked “a ton of questions” about every aspect of use and atmosphere, he chose an American Craftsman style for Ames House that give the 40,000-square-foot facility the human scale of an actual house, the plush spaciousness and natural setting of a country club, and the cleverly hidden efficiency of a hospital.

The cluster of gables that give the house its pleasingly varied outline of a small village? They’re false fronts, hiding flat roofs that hold air-conditioning units and collect water that drains to a pond on the property. Inside, artist-designed friezes of stained-glass panels let in light near the top of the ceiling while hiding those same air-conditioning units from view.

The first thing anyone sees upon entering the building are cozy parlors with cushy furniture and a huge, magazine-beautiful kitchen where patients and families can cook and eat meals together. Enormous windows are everywhere, offering in views of the woods and gardens outside.

From the central great room, with its grand piano and game tables, a wide corridor loops around the building, lit by sconces rather than overhead fluorescent light, and lined with rooms of every sort: exercise, meditation, art therapy, music therapy, teen lounge, children’s playroom; patient rooms with garden-side terraces and oxygen equipment

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hidden behind paintings that slide up and down; family rooms that can be converted to guest rooms where family members – including patients’ beloved pets – can gather, relax and sleep overnight. Rollaway beds and rocker recliners are also in each patient room for those who wish to stay near their loved ones. Two extra large rooms can accommodate large families.

Corridors are indented with “garages,” deep alcoves that hide parked wheelchairs and carts from view. Deceased patients and their families have a dignified exit area accessible to vehicles and out of sight of the main entrance, to protect privacy and everyone’s feelings. Staff members can walk an outdoor section of corridor or rest in their special staff lounge for needed breaks. Every door is wide enough to push a bed through, ensuring that patients at Ames House can go everywhere they want – outside, to do artwork, help bake cookies – whether they can walk or sit up or not. Nothing looks institutional: Real wood, soft carpet and upholstery prevail.

The list of ingenious solutions and humane amenities goes on and on. So do the roles of design and art in making the end of life as comforting as possible.

“Art is very important,” says Mullinax. He calls it an essential part of helping people go through a profound change he compares to a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. “That’s what hospice is,” he says, “a cocoon that provides that transition.”



Left: Ames Family Hospice House great room
Right: Ames Family Hospice House family kitchen
Photos courtesy of the Hospice of the Western Reserve

About the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture

CPAC is a nonprofit with a mission to strengthen, unify and connect greater Cleveland's arts and culture. Research is a core component of our work, and one of many ways we support arts and culture. CPAC provides counsel related to public policy that benefits the sector and the broader community. It provides a number of tools through cultureforward.org and mycreativecompass.org for arts and culture professionals and those who would like to engage with them. CPAC also carries out a variety of programs and services that help build the sector's organizational and business practices to support a vibrant, thriving greater Cleveland. www.cultureforward.org

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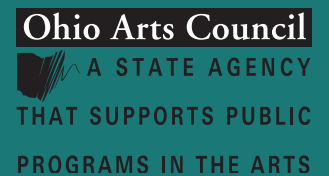


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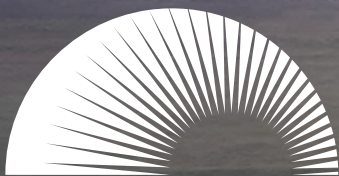


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