



Local art featured at new Rogers cancer center

By: **ASHLEY BATCHELOR** | 01/29/12 2:00 AM

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Jesse M. Coker sits in a recliner in a chemotherapy suite. To his left, a colorful print filled with butterflies hangs on the wall, brightening the otherwise neutral room.

An art collection featuring local artists was developed at Highlands Oncology Group's new cancer center in Rogers, which opened last July. Coker receives monthly treatments at the facility for chronic lymphatic leukemia, diagnosed in 1989. The Rogers resident says sometimes when he arrives at the building, he stops to look at the artwork and see what he can find in his favorite pieces - a print of birds in the downstairs waiting area and the butterflies, both by artist George Dombek of Goshen.

"I can't tell if it makes a lot of difference in the way I physically feel, but I think mentally they're very nice," he says.

Julie Wait Fryauf of Julie Wait Designs, interior designer for the project, says her whole concept was to "create a calming, less stressful environment for people who are in a very stressful situation in their lives," and she felt the artwork would help generate that ambiance.

The collection also gives the public more access to works of art and helps support local artists, she says.

The 140 pieces by some 20 artists - most from northwest Arkansas and a few from southern Missouri - were installed throughout the 55,000-square-foot, two-story building. The art includes landscapes and still-life paintings, prints, photographs, fabric art, fiber art, hand-painted bowls and giclees, which are fine art digital prints.

Fryauf said there was quite a bit of sentiment among doctors at the practice that they wanted to build a collection of art by local artists rather than purchasing mass-produced images.

Dr. Dan Bradford, who has been with Highlands Oncology Group for 21 years, said he and other doctors wanted local art because most cancer patients receive their care locally. He said the building and artwork inside it are part of the healing process and comprehensive care.

"It makes it a much more homelike and nurturing place," he said.

Fryauf said she wanted to choose scenes familiar to residents of northwest Arkansas, so she picked quite a few landscapes and

paintings with nature motifs.

"Nature is the best art for healing environments." She said she also wanted to emphasize water and its "healing aspects." Because of this, there are a lot of waterfall images, she said.

The works are representational art that they hoped would be inspiring and calming to the patients. Fryauf said there has been a lot of research done that patients in healing centers "become distracted and even upset sometimes over artwork that is nonrepresentational because they can't figure it out."

Colors were also a consideration. She said she didn't exclude any colors, but certain colors were only used minimally. She was cautious about using a lot of red because of connotations of blood, for instance. She and the doctors were also careful about using unusual shades of green, such as pea green or yellow-green, because a lot of patients are fighting nausea when undergoing chemotherapy or other cancer treatments.

Fryauf and the doctors were also circumspect about subject matter. They stayed away from something that might be perceived as lonely, such as a single barren tree with no leaves, because they never wanted patients to feel they were alone in their battle. Art with the connotation of tumor-like shapes was also nixed.

The most significant art was placed in the waiting areas, which are large-scale spaces with taller ceilings that can accommodate up to 40 patients, Fryauf said. Their first priority was to put the nicest, largest pieces where patients and their families could enjoy them, she added. Those areas include limited-edition prints by Dombek, along with originals by painter Alice Andrews of Boxley and colorful giclees by Johnathan Harris of Siloam Springs.

The next area they focused on was the chemotherapy suite, which accommodates 30 recliners where people receive treatment. This room features a print by Dombek and landscape and still life paintings and giclees by Tim Jones of Rogers, Carol Dickie of Eureka Springs and Jane Troup of Springfield, Mo. The choices have tangible results, office manager Candy Hebar said, with incidents of nausea down by half thanks to the calming atmosphere in the chemotherapy suite. Hebar adds that people don't seem to mind spending hours in the treatment room because it is so comfortable.

The entry stairwell features large-scale panoramic photography by Edward Cooley of Rogers, and the hallways display large nature photographs by Edward Robinson of Eureka Springs, William Dark and Helen Thomas, both of Rogers, Lorinda Gray of Siloam Springs and David Burt of Missouri. The smallest photograph is 24-by-36 inches, and Fryauf believes the photography makes traveling through those long corridors more pleasant. Original paintings by Jason Lahay and hand-painted bowls by Kathy Thompson, both of Fayetteville, were placed in the clinic and cafe, according to the press release.

Other patient areas feature giclees and an original by Julene Baker of Rogers and fabric art pieces by Jennifer Libby Fay of Fayetteville, Jeanie Wyant of Fayetteville, Stella Starnes of Hindsville and Suzanne Sanders Tourtelot of Eureka Springs. Artwork was also used in the administrative offices, but this was the last priority because "the doctors were much more interested in making sure that the areas that are frequented by the patients had the very nicest pieces," Fryauf said.

Fryauf added that the collection has offered new visibility for the local artists.

"The patients and the employees within the cancer clinic have been surprised at the quality of art that we have available right here in Northwest Arkansas," she said.

Baker, a Rogers artist, said she was thrilled when she found out she was one of the artists chosen for the collection and appreciated the use of local art. "Art in general makes people feel better," she said, and in her opinion, there isn't a better place to put artwork than in hospitals and doctors' offices.

Andrea Lackey sat in a waiting room Tuesday in front of art piece by Baker. Lackey, a resident of Washburn, Mo., has been a patient with Highlands Oncology for years, and during this trip, she was waiting on a friend of hers, who is also a patient. She said the artwork is "not the normal hospital pictures."

"It makes you feel at ease," Lackey said of the art.

The staff enjoys the art as well.

"I love coming to work every single day because it is so inspiring and calming, and I really enjoy working in this building," office manager Hebar said.

Bradford said the staff continuously hears comments from patients about the art, and none have been negative.

"I don't go a day without someone positively commenting on the artwork," the doctor added.

He said the environment can give patients a better experience "we hope will actually translate into better outcomes in their care."

Information from: Northwest Arkansas Times, <http://www.nwaonline.com>

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