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Hands on Health

Duncan Regional Hospital takes 'leap' with new, \$1.3 million learning center

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DUNCAN — Duncan Regional Hospital wants local children to get their hands on health.

The 2,400-square-foot Hands on Health Interactive Learning Center cost Duncan Regional Hospital about \$1.3 million to build, said Stephanie Gates, director of public relations for the hospital. The center is open Monday to Friday by appointment for any school for free.

Inside it is colorful, with plenty of room. There are interactive displays, shoes for children to stand in to activate videos about different career opportunities and opportunities to play the part of various health care workers.

"Not many people work for a company that takes an out-of-the-box idea and turns it into a reality practically overnight," said Scott Street, CEO of Duncan Regional Hospital.

He said the objective of the Hands on Health Interactive Learning Center is to create a spark in children to want to be in health care.

"If we don't create a spark in kids to be in health care, we'll be in a world of hurt," Street said.

Timothy Magner, director of the Office of Educational Technology for the U.S. Department of Education, said the center has a good blend of hands-on learning and information that is clearly child oriented.

Taking into account the center's features (like walking in the professional's shoes, the connecting classroom material, the mock surgery suite and the mock pharmacy), Manger said, "there's a lot of great information kids are getting exposed to in an engaging environment."

"It speaks to the opportunities and challenges we have in education," he said. Schools want to expand where and how they teach, partner with the community and prepare children to solve problems we haven't considered in careers we haven't imagined.

"You'll see the benefit of this investment when you see the next hospital director or a new doctor or heaven forbid, when you're sitting on the operating table with a student inspired by this," Magner said.

There are a few traveling exhibits on the body, but no facilities like this with a focus on health care.

"The hospital board and the foundation board — we are definitely looking to expand in the future (if it goes over well)," she said.

Cherilyn Murer, owner of Murer Consultation, said Street's vision never would have become reality without the support of the boards who have the responsibility to manage the hospital's money and investments.

"Great things happen when you take a leap," she said. "This is a reflection of the leadership (the hospital) has taken."

Magner said the engaging environment at Hands on Health will create a relevant connection for students asking "why do I need algebra?" and "what is biology going to do for me?"

"I wish I could bring my kids (here); they'd love it," Magner said.

Beth Curry, coordinator for hands on health, said the whole process started in June 2007, but she is fairly certain the idea had been in Street's mind for a few years. The educators committee worked through the summer to get the design process started.

"They chose their favorite ideas for what would truly impact a student's life," Curry said.

Street said Duncan Regional Hospital worked with Marilyn Townsend and CVC Communications Business Storytellers to design Hands on Health.

"We had a lot of ideas up here and on a napkin, and her firm made it reality," Street said.

'Bigger than I imagined'

Townsend said the center is designed for kindergarten through eighth grade, and it has a Web site with pre- and post-visit classroom activities and instruction. The center is designed so that the experience will be different for each grade level.

The results are "bigger than I imagined," Curry said. "It doesn't matter how much you talk about it or see pictures of it, you don't understand it 'til you come in and play."



RANDY STOTLER/STAFF From left, Kerri Boyer, Stacie Pennington and Sandy Hill, all with Integris Health, play surgery in the Hands on Health Interactive Learning Center. This is only one of several such "touch encouraged" areas in the center.



RIGHT: Sherry McGhghy, eighth grade teacher at Duncan Middle School, crawls out of the mouth of the giant face, while Timothy Magner, director of the Office of Educational Technology for the U.S. Department of Education, slides down the nose at the Hands on Health Interactive Learning Center.



RANDY STOTLER/STAFF LEFT: Welcome to the stomach at the Hands on Health Interactive Learning Center. Stations in the center cover the face, the lungs, the stomach and several career paths available in health care.



MIDDLE: Timothy Magner, director of the Office of Educational Technology for the U.S. Department of Education, considers crawling through the throat and out the mouth or down the slide in the nose to get to the rest of Hands on Health Interactive Learning Center.