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Operation Healing and Peace

New VA Health
Care Complex
puts veterans
front and center

By Melissa Countryman



From a distance, the building stands majestic and commanding. Up close, the vibe is quite different. Disarming. Inviting. Accommodating. Charlotte's gleaming-new Veterans Affairs Health Care Center (HCC) beautifully accomplishes dual objectives of saluting the thousands of men and women the facility will serve, and putting veterans at ease using the array of primary care and specialty services now at their disposal.

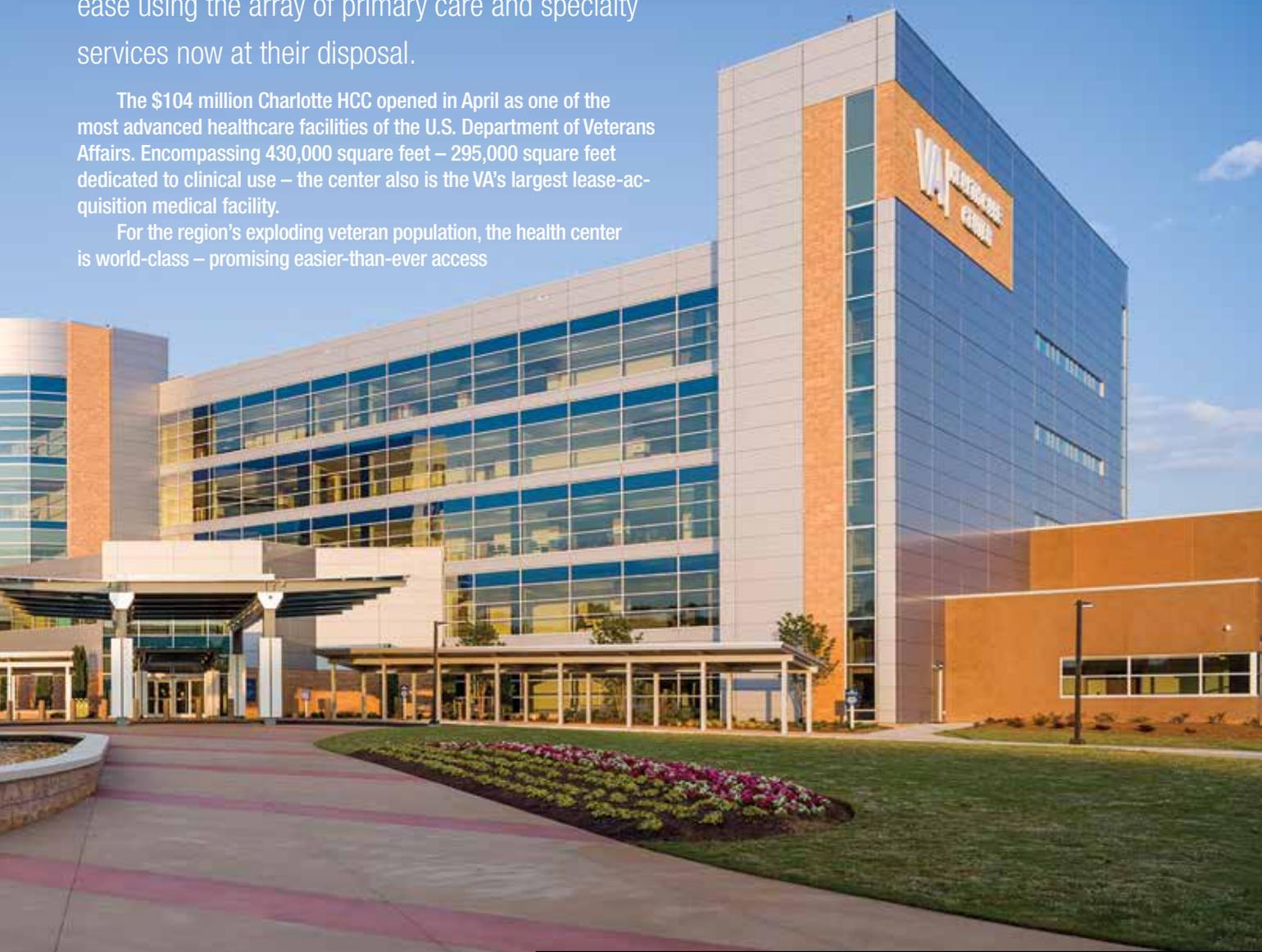
The \$104 million Charlotte HCC opened in April as one of the most advanced healthcare facilities of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Encompassing 430,000 square feet – 295,000 square feet dedicated to clinical use – the center also is the VA's largest lease-acquisition medical facility.

For the region's exploding veteran population, the health center is world-class – promising easier-than-ever access

to care, broader-than-ever treatment and diagnostic options, and all-in-one convenience.

The project team took special care to dispense with institutional tradition. Instead, the center welcomes veterans and their families into a bright, spacious, uplifting environment designed for easy navigation.

"This has been many years in the making, and we're excited to show you our brand new healthcare center. I truly believe you will be amazed at what you will see inside," says ceremonial ribbon cutting speaker Kaye Green, director of the Salisbury VA Health Care System, which encompasses the new Charlotte facility.



Covering 430,000 square feet – 295,000 square feet supporting clinical use – and employing ultramodern design concepts and tools, the VA HCC Charlotte provides outpatient primary and mental care, and many specialty services including operating rooms, radiation and imaging, and kidney dialysis units to one of the fastest growing veteran populations in the U.S.

Joined forces

Partners in the project's dynamic melding of ideas, expectations and numbers crunching included the Department of Veterans Affairs; Childress Klein Properties and Cambridge Development Group, forming Childress Klein-Cambridge Healthcare Solutions; general contractor JE Dunn Construction, Charlotte office; and architect RPA Design of Charlotte.

Childress Klein-Cambridge was formed to design, build and manage the building, which it owns and leases to the VA. The health center's development was complex. Success with budgeting, scheduling and owner/user satisfaction revolved around an intense process of designing and pricing — Price, Evaluate, Enhance, Build.

JE Dunn Construction consulted historical building cost data, tapped its large pool of subcontractors, manufacturers and suppliers, and called on the company's in-house experts to support the design team and owner, ensuring that design documents aligned with the project's budget and ambitious work scope. "JE Dunn was able to offer us a very competitive price on a highly complex job early in the process, with limited design information," says Tom Coyle, a partner with Childress Klein.

Throughout the job, in line with JE Dunn's lean culture of continuous improvement, the general contractor, the design team and the building owner continued to explore ways to enhance the project. Working with this team not only on planning and coordinating, but also on adding value to the project, was quite a rewarding experience for the JE team.

A fascinating and atypical element of the project was the imperative to accommodate two distinct, yet joined-at-the-hip clients — the developer and the VA. With that, came the need for JE Dunn to provide split pricing. For example, an area of the building that called for, say, five electrical outlets might require billing the VA for three units and the developer for two, based on each party's unique budget, building performance needs, regulatory mandates (local, state, federal), and other singular considerations.

"Sears Contract Inc. has worked on three separate, but similar VA medical centers for three separate contractors,"



The impressive six-story, brick and glass complex stands with a commanding presence on 35 acres near the Charlotte Douglas International Airport. Project features are specific to the unique needs of Veterans, including extra handicap and motorcycle parking and an extended three-vehicle canopy for simultaneous loading and unloading of patients.



Colorful wall murals of familiar places can be seen throughout the VA HCC Charlotte, encouraging an sense of security. Fountains, courtyards and quiet spaces contribute to the atmosphere of wellbeing and peace.



In the event that a patient needs to be seen by multiple specialists, the Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) design allows patients to remain in one room while the doctors and nurses come as needed. Centralized workstations facilitate patient record collaboration among specialists directly outside of the room.



From CT scans to prosthetics, audiology, dermatology and women's health, to name a few - the VA HCC Charlotte is a "one-stop shop", providing all outpatient services that a veteran might need under one roof, eliminating doctor appointments scattered far and wide.



A large, two story entryway welcomes Veterans, complete with the official United States Department of Veteran Affairs seal custom in laid with terrazzo in the center of the room. Located immediately to the left, user-friendly kiosks allow patients to check themselves in with ease.

says Jim Sears, VP of Sears Contract, a commercial drywall company. "The Charlotte facility was by far the best coordinated and smoothest project of the three. For a facility that was extremely complicated and detailed, the construction process was much more successful with JE Dunn coordinating and leading the way."

Significantly, the project overcame a bump early on when construction crews unexpectedly hit rock. Construction crews also made up 63 days lost to rain, snow and other nasty weather. All told, workers logged approximately 800,000 hours and completed the project with zero days lost to incidents.

"This project was ahead of schedule and on or under budget, and that is a great

Charting the numbers

- \$104 million construction budget
- 800,000 construction hours
- 295,000 square feet for clinical use
- 40,000 veteran capacity annually
- 2,000 jobs generated during construction
- 1,900 parking spaces
- 20+ medical services provided
- 0 work days lost to incidents

feat in today's environment," says Kaye Green, director of the Salisbury VA Health Care System.

Smorgasbord of services

Cardiology, dermatology, audiology, women's health, mental health, podiatry and prosthetics – all are among the more than 20 services planned to be provided by the health care center, which includes four operating rooms and 17 kidney dialysis units.

With a single visit, a veteran will be able to fill a cavity, stitch a wound, get a pap test, pick-up prescriptions at the pharmacy, receive physical therapy – and more.

An estimated 140,000 veterans live in metropolitan Charlotte, within the VA's Salisbury district. This district is home

to some 250,000 ex-military women and men, and has one of the fastest growing veteran populations in the U.S. Offering outpatient services only and greatly expanding patient care provided by clinics in Charlotte, Kernersville and Asheville, and by the W.G. (Bill) Hefner VA Medical Center in Salisbury, the new center can accommodate 40,000 veterans annually (eligibility required).

JE Dunn superintendent Ken Cornell can point out many inconspicuous but important construction methods and building features incorporated to save time, curtail expenses, eliminate waste, conserve energy, and achieve other objectives.

For example, the building's 292 pre-cast metal wall panels were manufactured in Spartanburg, South Carolina, contributing regionally resourced materials. The facility's blast-resistant design bolsters building security and protects occupants against explosion and toxic material releases. The use of Building Information Modeling (BIM) made it possible to prefabricate, among other things, all of the building's overhead plumbing – with only a small bucket of scrap piping left over. The project is pursuing LEED Silver certification.

Likewise, patients may be unaware of the VA's service delivery model known as PACT (Patient Aligned Care Team). They are, however, likely to appreciate PACT's benefits – engagement with a compassionate, coordinated care experience. Clinics and diagnostic areas, for example, are organized into neighborhoods laid out to encourage collaboration among caregivers and to facilitate the smooth flow of personnel behind the scenes.

"It's amazing – we're going to do wonderful things here," says Charles Stamper, Charlotte imaging supervisor who notes the facility's ultra-modern technology and the spaciousness of radiation and fluoroscopy rooms.

Clearly evident are the amenities that reflect commitment to veteran-centered caregiving and accommodation. The center's 37-acre campus is five minutes from an interstate highway interchange. With 1,900-plus parking spaces, there is abundant parking, including spots aplenty designated for motorcycles and bicycles. Handicap parking

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is convenient to the building entrance, where a canopy can handily accommodate three vehicles simultaneously loading and unloading passengers.

Inside the six-story, brick and glass building, a two-story tower bathes visitors in natural light, abundant throughout the facility. A cluster of touch-screen kiosks bids veterans to check-in electronically. Each floor has a canteen area. Each of the building's three clinic floors is identified by a colorful wall mural with a familiar North Carolina nature theme – Grandfather Mountain and Cape Hatteras, for example – complementing on-site fountains, courtyards and quiet spaces that support healing and well-being. **FC**

Melissa Countryman is VP at JE Dunn Construction and oversees the Healthcare and Life Sciences Groups for the JE Dunn Charlotte office. She has more than 17 years of experience focused on healthcare construction.



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