

## DELL CHILDREN'S MEDICAL CENTER

# The next level of care for kids

## Hospital to open Saturday with 'the potential to do it all.'

By [Mary Ann Roser](#)

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Dr. Tim George could have worked anywhere — or stayed put at the prestigious Duke University Medical Center. Instead, the nationally known brain surgeon took a gamble on an unbuilt hospital in Austin.

George, who arrived 10 months ago, is among more than two dozen pediatricians and pediatric surgeons lured to Austin by the promise of the new Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas, which will open Saturday.

Rising from 32 acres where planes once took off and landed, the hospital was the catalyst for transforming the shuttered Robert Mueller Municipal Airport into what is expected to be one of Austin's most ambitious neighborhoods.

Now, the hospital is about to change the landscape for children's medical care in a 46-county region. Not only has it been a magnet for doctors, but it is also attracting new research and medical services to the region. Some say it could be the cornerstone for a medical school, a long-sought prize that would further Austin's ambitions to become a biomedical industry player.

"We have a state-of-the-art facility ... and all of the elements are there to compete," George said.

Executives with the Seton Family of Hospitals, which will own and operate the \$200 million nonprofit hospital, believe it will be a showcase for design, energy efficiency and healing. They point to gleaming halls that sport Hill Country limestone and wood, and to a digital record system that uses "smart" software to reduce treatment errors. They expect it to be the first hospital to win a top rating for energy and environmental design. They show off the healing gardens, natural lighting and interior courtyards — part of a trend in hospital construction to use natural elements shown to speed recovery.

Most of all, doctors expect it to earn a national reputation for children's care, which will include services not available before in Central Texas.

For example, within a year, the hospital will be doing bone marrow transplants, so families won't have to travel to Houston or San Antonio. Hospital President and CEO Bob Bonar expects to do a dozen the first year.

The hospital will offer virtually all of the same services as most U.S. children's hospitals, including long-term rehabilitation care, said Sister Teresa George, chief operating officer of Children's Hospital

of Austin, which is being closed, and Dell Children's. Local children typically go to San Antonio for that care now.

Children also will receive complex neurosurgical and facial reconstructive services not available before in Austin.

"We've built up all the medical subspecialties so the only reason a person would have to travel is for an evaluation for an extremely rare disorder or a transplant of an organ," said Dr. Phillip Berry, chief of the medical staff and a pediatric kidney doctor.

Within five years, he expects the hospital to do kidney transplants, the first major organ transplants to be offered to children locally.

"We wanted to have a hospital where we could do it all," Berry said, "or at least have the potential to do it all."

The potential of the Dell facility was a key selling point for George and other recruits who left high-profile positions to create something new in Austin.

Dr. Todd Maxson once practiced here but left about seven years ago to expand his academic and research horizons. But with Austin's pediatric programs maturing and the new hospital on the horizon, he said, he came back 11 months ago from Dallas, giving up jobs as director of trauma services at Children's Medical Center and assistant professor of pediatric surgery at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School.

Maxson came to build a program for treating childhood trauma and injuries. The new hospital will have its own trauma center and will seek the most advanced certification, usually reserved for centers linked to medical schools.

### **Ambitious research goals**

When the doors open Saturday at the Dell hospital, doctors and staff members will be working in a dynamic environment under academic and research-oriented alliances carried over from Children's Hospital of Austin. The doctors will mingle with residents from across the country and with medical students from the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. Some will do research with UT-Austin scientists.

A lot of that science will go on across the street at the \$97 million Dell Pediatric Research Institute, to open next year.

It won't have a cafeteria, and "that was deliberate," said Dr. Kenneth Shine, executive vice chancellor for health affairs at the UT System. The point is to have "investigators walking across the street and interacting" with hospital doctors, he said.

George, whose team has brought more complex neurosurgery to the region and who will start new epilepsy services when the hospital opens, hopes to unravel riddles about brain tumors and other serious illnesses. He believes that working with great minds in genetics, cell biology, environmental health and other fields will help accomplish that.

"You have to build new bridges, integrating all of these institutions together," he said.

Dr. Patrick Kelley said he was able to attract top talent when he moved here from the University of Washington in Seattle "to grow a center from scratch" in craniofacial surgery.

"It's really true in medicine," he said. "Build it, and they will come."

Among them was Dr. Adriana Da Silveira, one of a handful of orthodontists nationwide who use dental appliances to shift a child's teeth and bones to prepare for complex surgery, Kelley said.

"I can be somebody who can help a whole lot of people," said Da Silveira, who came from the University of Illinois.

Kelley is part of a nonprofit physicians group whose goal, training new doctors, meshes with the UT Medical Branch's expansion plans.

That institution, which sees Austin as a satellite to its Galveston campus, is increasing the number of doctors and medical students it sends here for training.

By fall, the number of pediatric residents (new medical school graduates) will climb from 39 to 45, said Dr. T. Samuel Shomaker, UT Medical Branch's dean of medical programs in Austin. The number of third-year medical students here will soar from 19 to 36.

A service will be added: helping school districts work with students' behavioral problems, developmental delays and learning disabilities, Shomaker said.

The hospital has created a buzz, not just in Austin.

"I saw it when it was 70 percent complete . . . and I thought it was one of the most beautiful facilities I have been in," said Leslie Wyatt, president and CEO of a long-term children's rehabilitation hospital in Richmond, Va. She said she was impressed by the array of services "from tonsils to hearts."

But there is more to do.

"The Dell Children's hospital is positioning itself for a much greater contribution to medicine, and that will take awhile," said Lawrence McAndrews, president and CEO of the National Association of Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions in Alexandria, Va. "The older children's hospitals that have the longer-standing affiliations have taken decades to do that."

Many of those older hospitals are linked to medical schools.

Shine, the UT health affairs official, would not comment on whether the hospital will plant the seeds for one here. Efforts to establish one face significant hurdles, including competition in the Legislature with needier Texas regions that also are seeking financial support for a medical school.

"I'm very pleased, but I'm not satisfied," George said of his new professional home.

"To have a true full-fledged Austin-based medical school . . . that will make it top 10. That's when I will be truly satisfied."

### **The money flowed in**

Though construction is nearly finished, the work of collecting donations for the hospital goes on.

Of the \$200 million cost, \$125 million is being financed by Ascension, Seton's parent, based in St. Louis, and \$75 million is coming from private donations. The Michael and Susan Dell Foundation pledged \$25 million — \$1 for every \$2 from other sources.

"When we considered the opportunity that we could help give these children a healthy future and realize their dreams outside of those hospital walls, we were fully on board," Susan Dell said in a recent e-mail.

The Dell pledge attracted 20 gifts of \$1 million or more, said Missy Wood, executive director of the Children's Medical Center Foundation of Central Texas.

The campaign has exceeded its goal, according to Seton's Web site. Wood said a final total will be announced after the campaign officially ends Saturday.

Fundraising began in January 2004 after a year marked by controversy about the new hospital.

Seton stunned the community with its announcement in fall 2002 that it was building a private children's hospital and closing the publicly owned Children's Hospital of Austin, which Seton has been operating on a long-term lease since 1995.

City officials and community leaders were angry that Seton had not consulted them or discussed the impact on city taxpayers. They accused Seton of grabbing a moneymaking asset from the city and worried that it would try to back out of the lease with the money-losing Brackenridge Hospital. The city crafted a longer-term lease with Seton that required improvements to Brackenridge and stiff penalties if it broke the lease.

Seton also drew criticism for proposing a site in far North Austin for the hospital. It soon settled on the old airport site, and people rallied behind the project.

Once fundraising for construction officially ends, Wood said, the foundation will turn to donors for help nurturing a \$100 million endowment. One promised project is an operating room MRI that would allow George's team to do scans during surgery rather than closing the surgical wound, wheeling the child out for scanning, and then reopening the wound for more surgery.

"We're thrilled with the support we have received," Wood said of the overall campaign. "The community has been extremely generous."

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### **How it's different**

A few features of the new hospital:

**Recycled airport:** Builders used 47,000 tons of Mueller runway material.

**Creative spirit:** It has more than 700 pieces of original art.

**Green prestige:** A top green design rating would be the first for a hospital.

**Healing views:** Six courtyards give natural light and mental relief.

**Form a circle:** Patient rooms surround a central staff desk, putting nurses near all.

**Courtesy of JB Goodwin**