

Susan Dell chats about hospital

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF
Saturday, June 23, 2007

The Michael and Susan Dell Foundation pledged \$25 million toward the \$200 million Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas, which will open June 30 at the site of the closed Mueller airport in Austin.

Susan Dell, wife of Dell Inc. chief executive and Chairman Michael Dell, responded by e-mail to questions about the new hospital.

Q: Why did you choose to support this project?

A: Improving the health of children in Central Texas is a key priority for the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation. We want to ensure that children in our community have access to quality health care for generations to come.

The population of Central Texas is estimated to more than double in the next 20 to 30 years, while demand for Children's Hospital services is expected to grow 28 percent faster than the population. The new medical center was desperately needed to meet the needs of our children and our community.

Q: What is your vision of the medical center?

A: Michael and I love that the old airport site was transformed into a state-of-the-art medical center that will soon be thriving with medical professionals and children, all focused on getting and staying healthy. This is not just a facility for sick kids; it's a place that will give children and their families hope for a healthy future and a better future, because of their access to quality health care.

It took many individuals, businesses and foundations to make this happen, and we are grateful and inspired by Central Texas' generosity and support for its children.

Q: How involved were you in the planning of the facility? Any memorable moments throughout the process?

A: I've visited the original children's hospital many times — sometimes meeting with administrators for grants and at other times because my own children were sick.

What has always touched my heart about our children's hospital is that whether these children were suffering from cancer or dealing with a chronic health problem, at the end of the day, they're still kids. They dream about their futures — from what they'd like to do next week to what they want to be when they grow up.

So 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.

Q: Which part of the project are you proudest of? Any desire to improve anything with it?

A: Michael and I are very pleased that the medical center is designed to treat the whole child: their physical, mental and spiritual needs. The medical center offers state-of-the-art equipment, leading physicians and medical staff, and the best technologies to improve pediatric health care. It also has a fantastic educational library, Internet access in every room, a beautiful chapel, open air gardens and amazing views.

I'd like to see the medical center expand its outreach for the educational and training center so that we're not only treating patients, but we're offering preventative education to help children and families form lifelong, healthy habits.

According to the architect, the center's unique NICU design is based on 40 years of change in neonatal intensive care design so its 30+ private rooms simulate as closely as possible the conditions of the womb with a quiet, dimly lit private space. With a charting station between every two rooms, the NICU creates an intimate environment for patient and family, but with good nursing visibility and access.

Q: How do you see the medical center evolving over the years?

A: Over the next several years, Michael and I see Austin evolving to the forefront of pediatric health care and research that will have implications and benefits far beyond our immediate reach of 46 counties.

It's very exciting to think about the medical breakthroughs that could be discovered right here in Austin. We envision people coming to Austin from all over the world seeking the very best that physician care and medical research has to offer.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin