



January 26, 2012

New Joplin Hospital Landscape Nurtures Nature

More than 400 trees can grow old at home

JOPLIN, Mo. – For a city stripped bare of so many trees, the rows and rows of saplings – more than 470 in all – with their plastic tags flapping in the wind are a hopeful sight. These young trees aren't growing in Joplin just yet, but they started there. And they'll be returning to their original site when Mercy Hospital Joplin opens in 2014.

The saplings – oak, hickory, sycamore, sassafras, dogwood and redbud – now lined out in almost two acres of Kin-Kam Tree Farm in nearby Aurora, Mo., first took root on the site of what will become the new Mercy Hospital Joplin. And they'll be returning there when the building is complete. While they're just one small part of Mercy's landscape design plan, they're a very significant piece of it.

Mercy's partner in this project is SWT Design, an environmentally-conscious planning and landscape architecture firm. "Mercy is working with SWT on a number of projects across the four states Mercy serves because we value their comprehensive approach to balancing the goals of each project with creativity, best practices and good environmental stewardship," said Terry Bader, Mercy's vice president of planning, design and construction.

The seed for the idea of transplanting the trees came from Marcia Long, one of Mercy's neighbors at the new hospital site. At a community meeting, Long asked Mercy if some of the saplings from the new site could be transplanted elsewhere before construction began.

"I feel bad about all the trees Joplin has lost," Long said. "I'm in favor of Mercy having a nice, new location, but not in favor of knocking down a lot of new trees. My husband and I have moved trees so I knew it could be done."

Together Mercy and SWT Design developed a plan to take that idea several steps further. The plan included employing regional businesses and involving the Missouri Department of Conservation.

Last December, representatives from SWT Design, Wickman's Gardens of Springfield, Kin-Kam Tree Farm of Aurora and the Missouri Department of Conservation met at the site of the new hospital to identify viable, native trees for transplantation.

Each tree was flagged with one of five colored tags representing a genus of tree: oak with orange; sassafras with green; hickory with yellow; pink for flowering trees such as dogwood and redbud; and purple for "other" canopy trees.

Glenn Kristek, a certified arborist and owner of Wickman's Gardens in Springfield, was in charge of the team that hand-dug and prepared the saplings for transplantation.

"Because of the rocky soil, it's not possible to save all the roots," Kristek explained. "If you lose some roots, you must also remove some corresponding branches. This increases the survival rate."



The saplings were then carefully mulched and transported to Kin-Kam Tree Farm where they were planted in fertile soil at the same depth they were originally found in nature.

“The soil line was visible on the bark,” Kristek said. “We used that as our guide. After the trees were planted, each was watered by hand, staked and tied with a flexible tie so it could stand tall despite ice, snow or wind.”

Ronda Headland, a community conservation planner for the Missouri Department of Conservation, said of Mercy’s efforts, “When a company takes the time and consideration to harvest plants from the site, then cares for them until construction is finished, that’s a concerted effort to be as local as possible and it shows a commitment to being a good steward of the resources. I am not aware of any company going to this extent to reuse plant materials on a construction site. This practice is very innovative. I would like to see this practice catch on and become more widespread.”

Mercy’s goal is to transplant 400 healthy trees back to the site of the new hospital after construction is complete. In all, more than 470 saplings were replanted and will be carefully nurtured at Kin-Kam. This allows for possible plant loss over the next two years.

“The beauty of saving these saplings was that we could preserve the trees God has given us on this property, that are genetically correct for the region and are used to our environment of hot then cold and droughts,” said Ted Spaid, co-founder of SWT Design, who devised the details of the plan to transplant the trees.

While significant, these 400 trees are just a small number of those to be planted at Mercy’s new site. An additional 2,000-plus regionally-appropriate trees will be planted when construction is complete. They, along with grasses and wildflowers, are just one part of the landscape design.

“Because the land was once a farmstead, there was a lack of diversity due to man’s intervention,” said Bonnie Roy, principal of SWT Design. “We’ll be able to restore it to what’s appropriate for this eco-region. When Mercy Hospital Joplin opens, the surrounding grounds will have a greater variety of trees, native grasses and wildflowers than what was on the land previously. It will be a beautiful space.”

Mercy is the eighth largest Catholic health care system in the U.S. and serves more than 3 million people annually. Mercy includes 31 hospitals, more than 200 outpatient facilities, 38,000 co-workers and 1,500 integrated physicians in Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma. Mercy also has outreach ministries in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. For more about Mercy, visit www.mercy.net.

###
