

# Health That Sings



TAG/The Architects Group designed a physicians' office park that is warm and homelike—including the welcome zapping of registration cubbies.

By Kelli M. Dugan

## QUICK PROJECT FACTS

**Project Name:** Singing River Hospital Office Park

**Location:** Pascagoula, Miss.

**Architect:** TAG/The Architects Group Inc., Mobile

**Construction Manager:** Stewart Smith, Johnson Development LLC, Birmingham

**General Contractor:** Hank Torjusen, Fletcher Construction Co. Inc., Pascagoula, Miss.

**Engineer:** Schmidt Consulting Group Inc., mechanical, electrical and civil, Pensacola, Fla.; Barter and Associates Inc., structural, Mobile

Creating a comfortable, welcoming facility where patients receive state-of-the-art care might seem a fairly standard order in the realm of healthcare design and construction, but TAG/The Architects Group Inc. took the request quite a bit further with the Singing River Hospital Office Park.

The recently completed three-story, 76,000-square-foot facility in Pascagoula, Miss., already has tentative plans for future expansion, but Dan Borcicky says his team is still celebrating the completion of a challenging but rewarding project.

"It was fun, because it was like designing three buildings in one and

watching them all come together seamlessly," says Borcicky, a TAG principal and the firm's design director.

The Mobile-based firm provided architecture, interior design and construction management services for the three-year project, begun in February 2008.

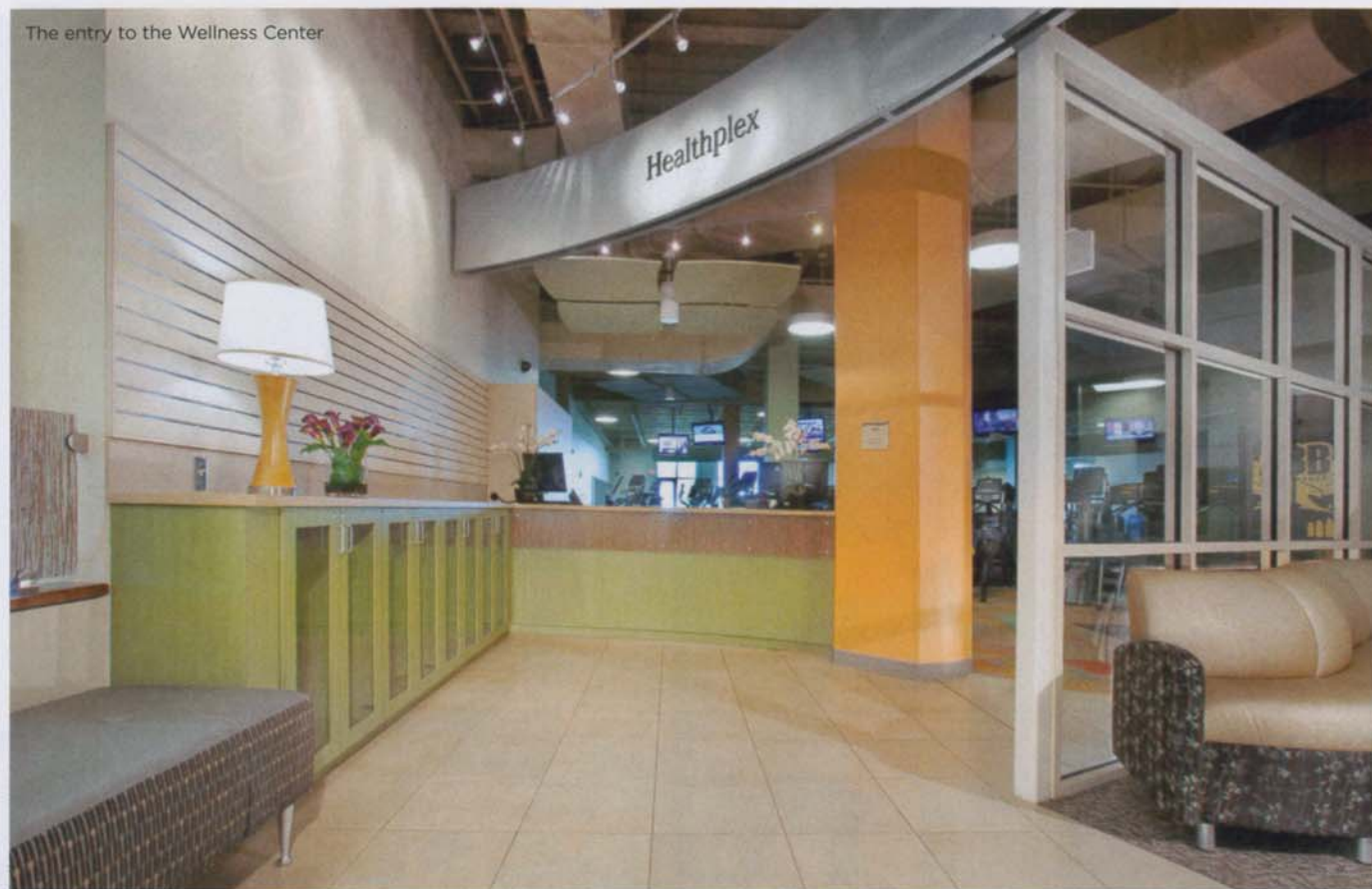
Specifically, the first floor houses the facility's comprehensive health and wellness center, featuring an indoor lap pool, cardio training space and strength and conditioning areas. The childcare facility, cardio rehabilitation services and physical therapy areas are also on the first floor.

The second floor has standard



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The entry to the Wellness Center



office suites, as well as a pain center and neurosurgery center, while the third floor houses a cutting-edge diagnostic facility and women's center.

"It was so interesting to put all of these different elements together and still have it feel like one building when we were finished," Borcicky says.

And although the project's developer did not opt to seek a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design designation for Singing River, interior designer Alice Cutright says LEED principles are an intrinsic part of TAG's approach and visible throughout the \$20 million project's design.

"Sustainability is something we're aware of and try to incorporate into all of our projects, so whether it's using materials with the most recycled content or working local vegetation into the design, that commitment is visible from start to finish at Singing River," she says.

Of course, removing the clinical stigma associated with healthcare design presented its own set of challenges.

Cutright says little touches—such as the hardwood floors throughout the third-floor women's center and the native reeds, grass and leaves worked into translucent panels surrounding the elevators—can easily give 21st-century facilities more of a living-room feel than their antiseptic predecessors.

In addition, Borcicky says drawings for the project were only about 30 percent complete when word came that the wellness center would be added, boosting

the square footage by nearly 40 percent from the original 55,000-square-foot projection.

"I had to work with my plan I already had and add on to it. You just adjust and keep working," he says.

To accommodate the last-minute change, Cutright says, TAG proceeded with construction of the building's shell, buying time to complete drawings of the revamped interior without slowing down the project.



Ronald McDonald House is a "home away from home" for the families of sick and injured children. In 2010, more than 1,260 families from Children's of Alabama, UAB and area hospitals enjoyed comfortable bedrooms and hot meals while being just steps away from their child's bedside.

This year, the Ronald McDonald House annual gala raised \$135,000 that will ensure all of its 41 rooms are open and available every night of the week.

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The physicians' office waiting area is beyond the second floor entry lobby.



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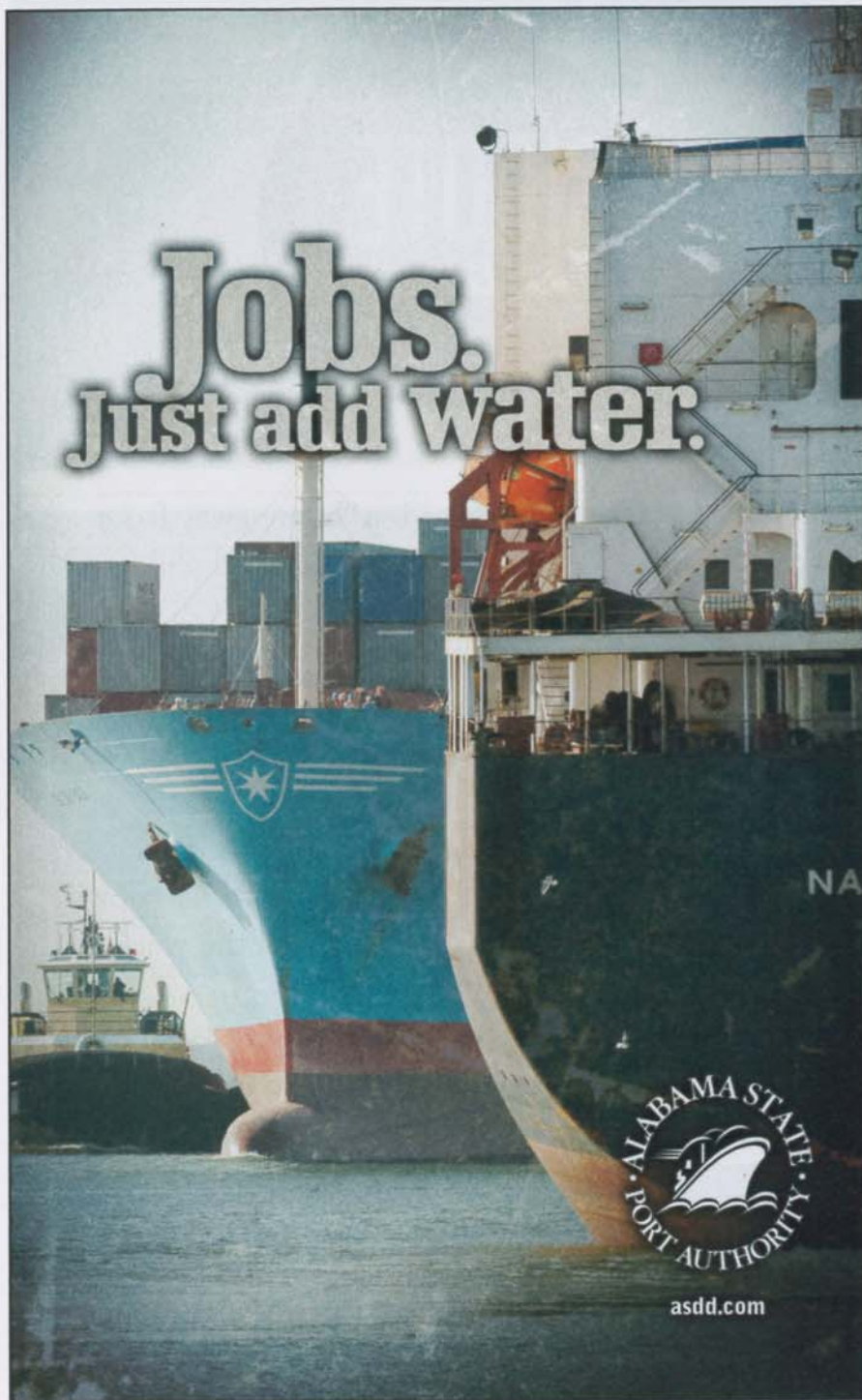
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"That way they didn't have to wait three more months to start construction while we finished up the drawings. We were able to get the project rolling, and that helped us stick to our timetable and our budget," Borcicky says.

Moreover, a developer spearheaded the Singing River project, meaning TAG not only had to contend with its requirements and budgets, but do so while ascertaining



the needs and constraints of both patients and facility staff.

Borcicky and Cutright agreed, however, that TAG's ability to tie so many competing functions together without compromising flow or aesthetics set Singing River apart from other contemporary medical facilities.

"We worked very hard to be sure it doesn't feel so clinical, and that meant incorporating a lot of natural materials and neutral color schemes with some accents that help tie everything together," she says, adding, "Durable, easily-cleaned materials are just a given for healthcare interior design, but Singing River definitely has more of a residential feel to it."

In addition, Borcicky says the first-floor registration area was designed to serve all of the building's functions in a sort of one-stop shop, while also offering interactive kiosks for patients who are already registered and in the system.

"It's very similar to what the airlines do, and it was a way for the staff to keep registration centralized but still give the more savvy patients a more user-friendly experience," he says. "It's also a very casual design that encourages interaction, and it completely eliminated the need for separate little registration cubbies."

Borcicky also notes special lighting was used throughout the project to highlight particular features, the use of rounded ceiling panels at key locations and the opening of a first-floor coffee shop.

"It just feels comfortable," he says.

*Kelli Dugan is a freelance writer for Business Alabama. She lives in Mobile.*