

BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE

THE PRACTICAL RESOURCE FOR THE FIELD'S LEADERS

Design showcase

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Selecting durable and safe furniture

A fresh start for homeless services

**Constructing solutions
for patients in crisis**

DESIGN RESOURCE DIRECTORY

A fresh start for homeless services in Miami

Camillus House is creating a multidisciplinary campus **BY KAREN M. MAHAR, MA, AND PATRICIA A. CAWLEY, LCSW**



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NEW CAMILLUS HOUSE CENTER



Camillus
House

To passersby the campus of the New Camillus House Center in Miami will look like a row of townhouses and eye-level retail. *Illustrations by Jose Paiva*

When Camillus House was founded in 1960, it provided meals and spiritual comfort to large numbers of Cuban exiles assembling on the shore of Biscayne Bay in downtown Miami, Florida. Nearly 50 years later, it operates 15 facilities spanning Miami-Dade County and houses more than 1,100 individuals each night. Yet its main center of operations remains in the same converted restaurant and retail lighting fixture stores where it first set up shop, cramming residential addiction and mental health treatment, overnight shelter, and basic human services into entirely inadequate space.

Now the organization is set to break ground on the New Camillus House Center (NCHC), a 7-building campus including 168,720 square feet of residential and

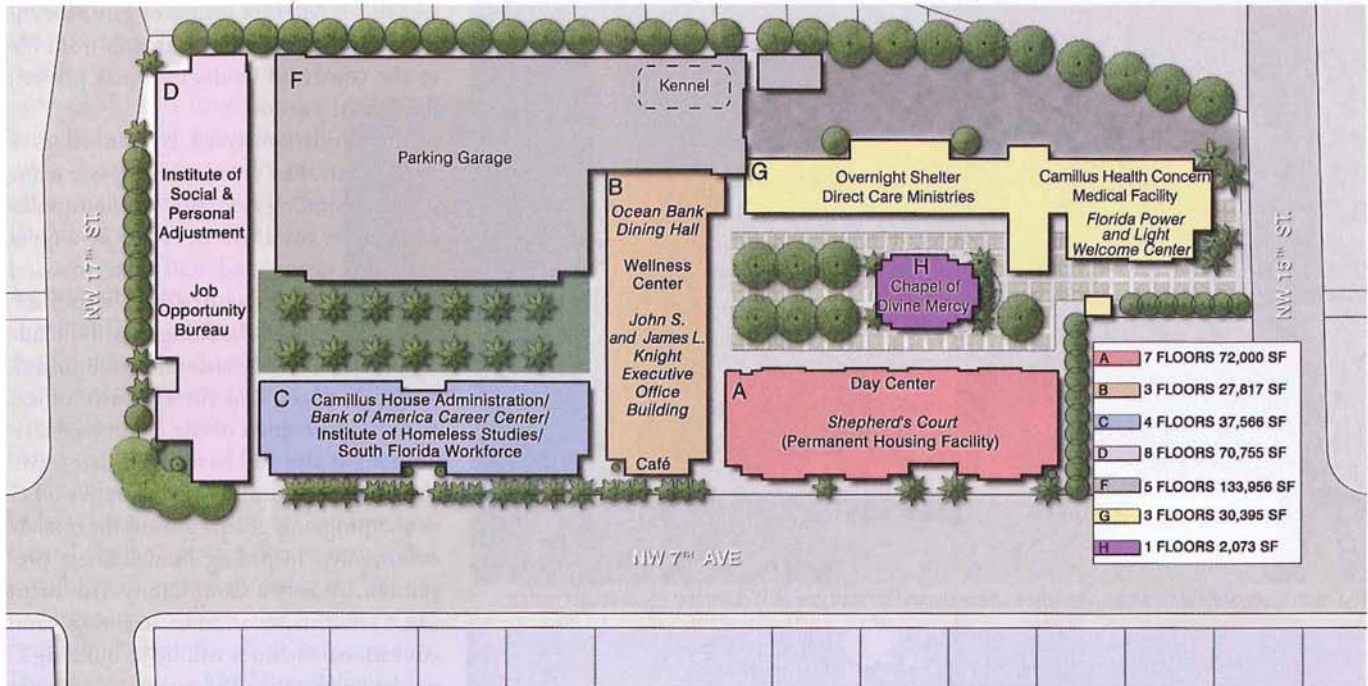
services space and a 136,393-square-foot parking garage (as of this writing the groundbreaking is scheduled for the fall). The \$80 million project will encompass 340 beds for short-term housing, residential treatment, medical respite, and permanent, low-demand housing for persons with severe mental illness, addiction, and/or serious medical disabilities. A comprehensive array of supportive services will be integrated throughout the facilities.

The project specifically targets persons who are chronically homeless, meaning that they have been homeless for a year or longer (or for three or more times in four years) and suffer from a serious disabling condition such as an addiction, mental illness, physical disability, and/or medical problem. Engaging and serving such a vulnerable population, whose members have

long-term, untreated conditions worsened by long periods sleeping on the streets, requires designing the facilities with this group's unique characteristics and needs in mind.

Oriented around two courtyards

The new campus will need to be a welcoming safe haven, yet allow for security and surveillance measures to ensure a safe and controlled environment. The surrounding community agreed to allow the NCHC into its neighborhood on the condition that it be designed such that its occupants and clients will not be wandering in and out day and night. Camillus House is not a lockdown program, and participation in all of its programs is voluntary. Thus, the challenge was to provide an environment where a population typically distrustful of



NCHC's 7-building campus will include 168,720 square feet of residential and services space and a 136,393-square-foot parking garage.

authority and difficult to engage will want to stay 24/7.

The project team's architects, Wolfberg Alvarez & Partners, addressed this challenge by incorporating two courtyards that will serve as the development's orienting features. The south courtyard is designed for persons recently living on the streets, offering a safe, contained plaza surrounded by an array of services. Recognizing that many persons with mental illness are not ready or able to come inside to an enclosed space with programmatic requirements, the courtyard offers a space where guests can sleep outside on mats protected by built-in overhangs. Experience shows that over time these guests will engage with staff and stabilize enough to accept services, treatment, and housing. Once ready, a courtyard guest will be welcomed into one of the programs housed in the buildings on the campus.



Karen M. Mahar, MA

Unlike many homeless shelters where overnight guests must leave during the day, NCHC will encourage guests to stay 24 hours a day. All of their needs will be met through a variety of "shops" lining the south courtyard, including a post office, a free clothing exchange, and showering facilities on the first floor of building G (see site plan). Upper floors will accommodate short-term housing, medical respite facilities, and a health clinic. On the opposite side of the courtyard, classrooms, a quiet reading room, and activity rooms will be available for those ready to take the step of registering for the Mental Health Day Center program.

The south courtyard will be a comfortable place with paving, large planters and oak trees to provide ample shade, and space for social activities. Guests will be able to check personal belongings into a large

storage room, and ample bike racks will be available. In the center of the courtyard a chapel will offer a place of contemplation and spiritual renewal, along with voluntary Catholic religious services. Religious services for other denominations will be held in the auditorium in building B.

Abutting the south courtyard will be Shepherd's Court (building A), a 7-story permanent housing facility with 80 1-bedroom apartments. Guests who initially come for shelter and services through the



A chapel in the south courtyard will offer a place for contemplation and spiritual renewal.



The north courtyard will be a park-like space where clients and staff can wind down and connect with nature.



Many services will be available to clients in "shops" lining the south courtyard.

courtyard program eventually will move into this building. The close proximity will allow guests to see what they can attain, while allowing them to remain close to their support system after becoming residents.

The kitchen and dining facilities (building B) will divide the southern portion of the campus from the northern

section. Much thought went into laying out the site plan to control the flow of clients, separating those recently on the streets from those living in longer-term residential treatment programs. If allowed to mix, the overnight shelter and courtyard guests potentially could bring in contraband and pull residential clients back into drug use and street life. Addi-

tionally, it will be a source of pride for individuals to make the transition from life in the courtyard to the campus's private, residential portion.

The north courtyard is planned as a serene, park-like space with mosaic stone benches winding alongside pervious walkways under royal palms. It will be a quiet space for clients and staff alike to wind down and connect with nature. In addition to the dining hall, building B will include a wellness center, boardroom, auditorium, program offices, and the executive offices suite. At the request of city commissioners, building B also will have a café that serves the local community. Administrative offices and programs geared toward the outside community, including homelessness prevention, Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams, workforce training, and educational facilities will be in building C on the north courtyard's western perimeter aligning the street. On the campus's north end, building D will encompass the Institute of Social and Personal Adjustment (ISPA) behavioral treatment facilities.

A pleasant atmosphere

A major concern in designing the 8-story building D was how comfortable to make the interior environment. It needs to be a welcoming, clean, and dignified atmosphere, without being so luxurious that residents will not want to leave. Community support would diminish if the accommodations are nicer than the facility's neighbors', and clients would not be anxious to transition into their own apartment if it would be perceived as a step down. Furnishings must be extremely durable and low maintenance but not too expensive.

Thus, residential units are modeled after a typical college dorm layout, with multiple bedrooms sharing a common area. Microwaves, but not kitchen facilities, will be included. Each bedroom will have 2 or 4 beds, depending on the program level. While it would be possible to provide

FACILITY DESIGN SPECIAL SECTION

more beds in a smaller amount of space by incorporating bunk beds, the project team decided against this. Because many of the program's clients have been in prison, the team thought that using bunk beds would encourage a return to an institutionalized mind-set.

A green campus

Camillus House's leaders feel strongly that we show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation, and they put this principle in practice in the new campus's design. The project will seek LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification to ensure that it will have a minimal impact on the environment and will provide a healthy and clean atmosphere for all of its occupants. The project team's LEED consultants, Sequil Systems, have presented innovative ideas to achieve the project's "green" goals.

Photovoltaic panels will provide solar energy to portions of the buildings, and energy-efficient building systems will produce significant savings. Waterless urinals and efficient toilets and faucets will reduce water use, and a highly efficient landscaping plan will decrease water needs by using native and drought-resistant plants, a drip irrigation system, smart controls, and well water.

General contractors will be required to recycle construction waste and to implement a pollution-control plan. Incorporating low-emission adhesives and sealants, paints and coatings, and carpets and flooring will reduce the amount of pollutants and toxins released into the indoor environment. Priority parking spaces will be designated for low-emission and fuel-efficient vehicles as well as carpool participants, and ample bike racks will be provided to encourage staff, visitors, and clients alike to take advantage of the beautiful South Florida weather and ride their bicycles to the campus.

A place for four-legged friends

Another unique aspect of the campus will be the kennel. Pets are important to many persons who are homeless, and being forced to abandon a pet can be a major barrier to engaging them into services. Achieving access to persons who are homeless often is dependent on providing compassionate hospitality to them and their pets. Local veterinarians will provide pro bono care to up to 18 cats and dogs housed in the kennel.



Patricia A. Cawley, LCSW

Exterior design

Zoning approval was contingent upon a commitment to present a noninstitutional façade along the well-traveled street. Thus, to passersby the campus will look like a row of townhouses and eye-level retail.

Conclusion

The NCHC is scheduled to be completed in spring 2011. The entire community has been engaged in supporting the new facilities. Camillus House is confident that the one-of-a-kind campus will provide the space and resources needed to end chronic homelessness in Miami once and for all. ■

Karen M. Mahar, MA, is Special Assistant to the Camillus House President. She is responsible for special projects including development of the New Camillus House Center. She has worked for Camillus House for 15 years and has served on the Boards of Directors for the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust and Miami Coalition for the Homeless.

Patricia A. Cawley, LCSW, is Chief Operating Officer of Camillus House, overseeing the day-to-day operations of the organization's administration, support services, and programs, including housing, treatment, employment, and direct emergency services.

For more information, e-mail karen@camillus.org or visit www.camillus.org.

More Online

For more illustrations of NCHC, visit behavioral.net/camillus0709.



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