

Good Samaritan opens new child care center for infants, toddlers

By Maria Wiering

mwiering@catholicreview.org

Twitter: @Reviewwiering

Even the toilets are tiny in the new Larry and Debbie Beck Infant and Toddler Center at MedStar Good Samaritan Hospital in Baltimore, which opened May 18.

The 1,800-square-foot facility is an addition to the hospital's Child Development Center, which previously only accommodated children ages 2 to 5. The new center provides care for children ages 10 weeks to 2 years, and can accommodate nine infants and nine toddlers.

The facility offers childcare for MedStar associates, including Good Samaritan employees, and the local community as availability allows.

"If you're not taking care of a patient, you should be taking care of someone who is, and we have a lot of working moms and working dads," said Larry Beck, who, with his wife Debbie, is among those who donated funds to build the center. Beck served as the hospital's president from 1994 to 2009.

Taking care of Good Samaritan's caregivers is an expression of the hospital's mission, Good Samaritan President Jeffrey Matton said.

"We are always looking for ways to better support our Good Samaritans," he said. "So much of the workforce in health care is women, and women of child-bearing age. A huge part of their life is trying to balance their work schedule with their personal life schedule, and this is a way to really step into that and say this is a way we can help you."

An infant and toddler center was part of the vision from the center's beginning, said Nancy Pelton, who was the center's director when it transitioned from a nearby church to its own building on the Good Samaritan campus in 1990.

"As somebody who's been in the early childhood field for 30-some years, it's just incredibly exciting," said Pelton, who is now the training and technical assistance director at the Baltimore City Child Care Resource Center. "Good quality care is of the utmost importance to our society, and is so needed."

Wanda Golden, Good Samaritan's present director of child care, described the center as the "manifestation" of a longtime dream.

"We're here to serve this hospital, and this institution, and the community, and that's got to make us feel good," she said.

Registered nurse Heather Reinsfelder has enrolled her 17-month-old son Mark in the new program after hearing coworkers rave about the care their children had received at the center.

"I was pretty impressed by the curriculum," she said, which includes new, up-to-date educational toys.

Reinsfelder is also glad to have Mark nearby while she's at work, she said.

Caregiver Kayla Thomas, who will oversee toddler care, said her favorite furnishing is the toddlers' changing table, which has steps for the children to climb.

Thomas, whose mother works for MedStar, is a 1995 "graduate" of the Child Development Center, and is excited to be part of its expansion, she said.

"From going here and coming back to the center and seeing how much it's grown over the years, I'm really privileged to be a part of it," she said. "It's like a way of giving back to MedStar."

The center's opening ceremony included a blessing by the hospital's director of pastoral care, Father Guy Kagere. The infant and toddler center will fully open for care May 21.

