

# Healthy prognosis

New Valley Hospital, to open in 2023, seen as a 'destination of the future'



**Patricia Clark, the director of facilities design and construction for Valley Health, talks Tuesday about various features coming to the new Valley Hospital in Paramus. Clark and her colleagues have been testing all components for the building.**

**Lindy Washburn**

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The Valley Hospital's new, \$800 million hospital in Paramus will be a monument to health care, the region's rising economic engine, located in the heart of its fading shopping sector.

The hospital, under construction near the confluence of the Garden State Parkway and Route 17 in what has been the mall capital of New Jersey, is due to open in 15 months.

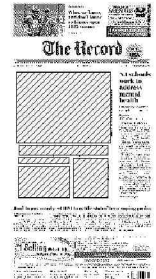
The massive, seven-story building is the centerpiece of a 40-acre Valley Health campus there that dwarfs its current home in Ridgewood, whose neighbors fought long and successfully to block its expansion.

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After a tour of the construction site, it's hard to imagine how Valley executives could ever have squeezed their dreams into a Ridgewood residential neighborhood. Each floor of the new building — equivalent in area to 3½ football fields, or 152,000 square feet — is larger than any single building at the Ridgewood site.

Patient rooms, all of which are private, are nearly double the size of ones the old hospital used for two patients.

The surgical area has been elevated from the basement to a sun-swept second floor with 22 varied operating rooms ranging from 650 to 1,000 square feet,



compared with 18 operating rooms of 450 square feet each in Ridgewood. The Emergency Department has 67 patient rooms, compared with 53 in the old hospital.

Over 500 construction workers are currently working on the project, said Joseph Lorino, Valley Health System's vice president of facilities management.

These builders have included excavators, crane operators and heavy-equipment operators, as well as concrete masons, cement finishers, steel engineers, welders and mechanics. Heating, ventilation and air conditioning technicians are on site now, along with installers of fire alarms, security systems, and temperature- and lighting-control systems. Carpenters, electricians, masons, plumbers, tile setters and glaziers are among the other workers, all unionized.

Construction began in July 2019 and has continued through the state's lockdown and the ebbs and surges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Later this month, a 26,000-volt electrical switch will be turned on, powering the air conditioning that will dehumidify the building and allow the installation of medical equipment.

Next year, after construction is scheduled to end in July, the long process of building approvals and state health facility inspections will commence.

And at the end of 2023, 72 years after The Valley Hospital opened its doors in Ridgewood and 16 years after Valley's leadership first outlined its dreams for the future, the new Valley Hospital will admit its first patients.

## **Betting on enormous investment**

By state and national standards, the project is a big one. But with health care one of the fastest-growing and strongest sectors of the economy, construction spending is at an all-time high. Despite supply chain delays and inflation, dozens of facilities nationwide have proposals in the works for new facilities and expansions.

Valley competes as a stand-alone hospital in a state dominated by two large, integrated health care systems — Hackensack Meridian Health and RWJBarnabas Health — and faces increasing inroads from New York medical giants like Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and the Hospital for Special Surgery.

But it is betting that its head-turning, state-of-the-art facility, combined with the growing health care needs of an aging population in a part of New Jersey that is both relatively wealthy and highly insured, will justify its enormous investment.

This "health care destination of the future," said Audrey Meyers, the hospital's 23-year president and CEO, "will incorporate cutting-edge technology and best practices" in health care and environmentally

sustainable design. It will “provide the flexibility necessary to adapt to changes in health care.”

Time will tell.

## Lessons learned from the COVID pandemic

Each of the new hospital’s approximately 354 patient rooms can be used for critical care. That means double the usual number of outlets for oxygen, medical gases and suction, and double the number of normal and emergency-power electrical outlets built into the headwall of each bed.

Changes in health care have shifted more and more procedures and treatments to outpatient settings, Lorino said: “In the future, only really sick people will be in the hospital.”

In addition to permanent isolation rooms in the designated critical care unit, all 36 rooms on each of the medical-surgical floors can be converted to negative air pressure at the push of a button. That means potentially infectious air inside the room is sucked out and filtered rather than recirculated. During the pandemic, the Ridgewood hospital had to quickly retrofit some of its rooms to create negative pressure and prevent COVID from spreading.

Pass-throughs and portals will allow nurses to service a patient’s intravenous lines and monitors from the hallway, without the need to don personal-protective equipment to enter the room, if necessary. That also avoids interruptions and preserves patient privacy. Nurses can restock supplies in a closet with doors on both sides of the wall, and remove laundry bins without entering the room.

And fabric curtains around the beds have been eliminated, with a few exceptions, to avoid possible contamination and cleaning challenges. For patient privacy, windows into the hallway or through the door have internal blinds that can be opened or shut. Private rooms also reduce the spread of infection.

## Lessons from Disney design

The design of the building separates patients and visitors from the behind-the-scenes operation of the hospital. As at Disney properties, the onstage and off-stage worlds are separate.

Dedicated elevators carry visitors to the patient floors, while others — activated only by staff ID badges — are for staff use and the movement of sterile materials, food, laundry or waste. The new hospital has 23 elevators, compared with eight at the old building.

Patient rooms face outward with windows along the outside of the building. Within each unit, a central hallway with staff entrances at both ends affords access to offices, break rooms, storage and other non-patient areas.

## Design input by staff, for staff

From its architectural design to the selection of finishes and furnishings, Valley's staff has had a voice in decisions about the new hospital. Surgeons, nurses, information technology specialists, food service employees and custodial staff all have been invited to give their opinions. They participated in days-long sessions with the architects planning the building and have visited life-size mock-ups of various rooms as the interior is designed.

Staff guided the layout of the emergency department, for example, with its ambulance bays adjacent to an elevator to carry patients directly to diagnostic imaging or surgery.

Surgical staff chose to arrange the brain-surgery suites so that patients would be transported to an adjacent magnetic resonance imaging machine for intra-operative imaging, rather than transporting the MRI machine to the operating room. They felt it would be safer, as the required safety zone around the big magnet would not move.

Custodians will help choose the flooring material for ease of cleaning, and nurses already have helped design the layout of each unit's nursing stations.

## Details matter

Full-size mock-ups of a patient room, an emergency room and an operating room in Valley's office building across the street from the new hospital are being used to test the layout, furnishings and fixtures.

For example, the workstation where a nurse enters her notes will be located so that the nurse can maintain eye contact with the patient, with the keyboard swinging out on a Lazy Susan. "We were very, very careful how we planned this," said Patricia Clark, director of facilities design and construction. "We wanted to be able to talk to you and still work on the computer."

Dimmer switches will slowly brighten the lights, so that the patient won't be jolted awake by a quick flip of the switch. Patients will be able to control the lights, temperature and window blinds, and order room service meals from their beds. Sliding doors will stop just short of the door frame, to avoid squishing the hand of the person closing it.

And each room will have a 75-inch television screen, on which patients can view entertainment or educational programming as well as lab results and imaging studies. The screen is split, with a panel along the right to show staff names — they will appear when

the staff enters, activated by their ID badge — and notes about the patient’s status.

Describing each element of the future patient rooms, Lorino was hopeful.

The design is so hospitable, said Lorino, “Patients won’t want to leave.”



**Joseph Lorino, the vice president of facilities management for Valley Health System, leads a tour of the new Valley Hospital in Paramus. Lorino walks along the building site, currently populated by more than 500 construction workers. PHOTOS BY ANNE-MARIE CARUSO/NORTHJERSEY.COM**



**Construction on the lobby of the new Valley Hospital in Paramus is seen on Tuesday. Dedicated elevators will carry visitors to the patient floors, while others, activated only by ID badges, will be for staff use.**

PHOTOS BY ANNE-MARIE CARUSO/NORTHJERSEY.COM



**Debra Aluotto, the project coordinator for Valley Health, talks about testing various features for the new Valley Hospital in Paramus. Staff members have had a lot of input as the project has progressed.**



**A mock-up of a labor and delivery room is one of several being used to help make final design decisions.**



**A mock-up of a labor and delivery bathroom.**