

A Mountain of Color for Joy: Confluence Health MOU Unveils New Mural by Local Artist to Inspire and Encourage

Wenatchee, WA: Visitors to the fifth floor of the Confluence Health Hospital Central Campus tower will notice a new splash of color greeting them in the form of a massive new mural stretching across an entire wall.

“This is something that I have been passionate about bringing to life for years,” explained Heather Sanchez, nursing manager for the medical oncology unit (MOU) at Confluence Health. “We have the privilege of serving and taking care of a small inpatient oncology population. Many of these patients spend weeks or months at a time on our floor and come back for recurring treatments. We celebrate their victories with them and grieve with their families when treatments do not work out and they transition to end of life care. Most of our oncology patients are independent and ambulating our halls numerous times each day and I wanted something to bring life into their lives on the MOU.”

The vibrant mural – painted in a geometric abstraction style with pixelated, blocky patterns in the colors of the sky and the mountains – shows a springtime scene of Saddle Rock in Wenatchee at sunset. During the planning phase of the project, Sanchez reached out to staff to vote on a theme and mountains – an appropriate metaphor for the challenges faced and defeated each day by cancer patients – was ultimately selected. The painting is the work of local, independent artist Kathleen Dyer who worked directly with Sanchez on the final design, including researching the project by spending time on the MOU floor to get a feel for the energy among staff and providers, along with hiking the foothills for inspiration. Before finalizing, Dyer also made a sketch for a mock-up of the piece. After approval was given in April, Dyer completed the piece in a single weekend in May, spending nearly 26 hours painting over two days.

“I have known Kathleen for several years and have always admired her artwork,” continued Sanchez. “Once I got approval from my leadership for this project, I knew she was the one I wanted to complete this vision.”

“It was just wake up, head there, and get to work for those two days. It was a lot of work, but the best part was getting to know the patients,” explained Dyer. “My original background color for the piece was going to be pink but, after meeting and seeing people, I decided that it wasn’t colorful enough and needed to have more joy added, so the piece evolved a bit as we chose the colors for the final mural.”

Dyer’s husband, Hans Hessburg, assisted in the painting work and in the important additional task of reminding Dyer to take breaks to eat when she got too engrossed in the art to remember.

“To me, this wasn’t really work,” reflected Dyer when asked about the meaning of the piece for her. “I went to art school to be an animator but ultimately took a different direction and mostly do freelance. This painting was one of the greatest honors I’ve ever had. Being involved in something that can bring joy to people who are in pain – whether patients or their families – was important to me. Each day is a gift, and this piece has been much more to me than just painting a mural. It really meant a lot to me to be involved.”

And that new addition to the floor is already being talked about and noticed.

“The goal was to pay a tribute to the oncology patients and families which we serve, while giving them something to distract them from the difficult days,” reflected Sanchez. “So far, everyone that I have talked to loves it! Patients and family members have sought me out to tell me how much joy it brings to them and how beautiful the colors are. Additionally, staff have ownership in this mural as they helped pick the theme and really got to watch this vision come to

life. It brings a lot of pride to MOU staff, demonstrating what makes the MOU special and the love we have for our patient population.”

About Confluence Health

Confluence Health serves the largest geographic region of any healthcare system in Washington State, covering over 12,000 square miles of Okanogan, Grant, Douglas, and Chelan counties. Confluence Health is one of only two locally-lead healthcare systems in the state with the purpose of maintaining availability and access to high-quality, cost-effective healthcare services for North Central Washington. The Confluence Health Board of Directors provides governance for Confluence Health and includes nine community board members and six physician board members.

For More Information

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