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## New pediatrics unit honors two girls

Wednesday, October 22, 2008 7:11 AM EDT

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**SANDUSKY** — Art to inspire smiles will join the science of healing at the new pediatrics unit of Firelands Regional Medical Center.

The new children's section is being renovated inside the hospital's former inpatient oncology unit. Although it is a work in progress, hospital officials opened the doors yesterday for a sneak peek at the painted gateway that will bear the floor's new name.

The Michelle Wightman and Karrie Wieber Pediatrics Unit will honor the Sandusky girls who were best friends. In February 1989, the two Sandusky High School sophomores died together in a fatal car-train crash at the city's Remington Avenue railroad crossing.

"This is just wonderful," said Darlene Lowery, the mother of Michelle Wightman. "I can't believe it, it's just really nice."

"It's so bright and cheery," said Karleen Wieber, mother of Karrie. "If you knew our girls, they were bright and cheery, I'll tell you."

Since the fatal crash, the girls' families have formed the charitable Wightman-Wieber Foundation.

, which promotes public health and safety around Erie County. The foundation made a gift to the hospital for the renovations to remodel the hospital wing.

"Not that I want kids to be sick, but they've got a nice place to come to," Lowery said.

The current pediatrics unit has eight beds in four semi-private rooms that can be partitioned for privacy.

"It's difficult to understand how you could rest in that setting," said Firelands Chief Executive Officer and President Chuck Stark. "This affords us the opportunity to give each family a private room for their child."

The new section will have 10 private rooms for children and furnishings for parents to stay overnight.

The unit also will have a play room decorated with painted frogs and tiles designed to look like a lily pond and grass. Liquid-filled "lava" tiles have designs that change when children and adults step on them.

Yesterday's tour, with Lowery, Wieber and members of the foundation's board, showed off the new murals by Toledo artist Carol Sicha.

The paintings feature bright and pastel hues and reflect the sights around Sandusky such as the Boy with the Boot statue in Washington Park, the Castalia Duck Pond, the roller coasters of Cedar Point and the water slides at local water parks.

"Outside each room is a vignette," said Carol Wolfe, a member of Firelands' board of directors who oversees interior decor of the hospital. "It shows you a thought, a theme.

"When you step into that room, if you're a patient in that room you'll see a continuation of that theme," Wolfe said.

The murals and increased use of light are a bright change from the "fairly traditional" decor in the hospital's current pediatrics wing,

Stark said.

"I like them all," Stark said about the figures and landscapes. "I particularly like the fact the characters are playful. Someone used the word timeless, whether you're a 3-year-old or 13 or 18, they're not too adult, they're not too child. They engage you."

The entrance mural is not complete yet, but the mothers saw a miniature preview of how their daughters' names will look.

"You spelled it right," Wieber said with a laugh.

"Oh, you scared me," said hospital foundation Development Director Alice Springer, prompting chuckles from the group.

The pediatrics area has prompted special interest in the community, with additional donations coming from the Sandusky Kiwanis Club, Firelands Auxiliary group and other people, businesses and organizations, Springer said.

The renovated unit is scheduled to open Dec. 15.

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