

SMART MOVES

Remarkable renovation

In just one year, a Florida nursing home in Ocala was transformed from a nondescript building into a marquee facility for Avante Group



Granite counters, a player piano and other home-like touches help give the community a more inviting look and feel.

Avante at Ocala (FL) is a great example of the phrase “What a difference a year makes.” In just over 365 days, Avante at Ocala transformed an empty shell to a state-of-the-art skilled nursing and rehabilitation center held up as a model for others to emulate.

Yet just 14 months earlier, the 39,000 square foot facility stood vacant with an uncertain future.

Avante Group President and CEO Dean Dickmann saw potential in the 42-year-old structure and leased it in November 2008. Soon afterward, Dickmann teamed up with Stevens Point, WI-based

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Joerns Healthcare Inc. (Joerns) and architect Steve Kahn to create what has become the marquee property in Avante’s portfolio of 20 facilities across Florida, North Carolina and Virginia.

“Joerns was a very good partner in terms of providing superior products and assigning a design team that worked very closely with Avante,” Dickmann said. “They were instrumental in helping to identify the right materials, colors and textures. As a result, we now have a beautiful, community that exceeds marketplace expectations.”

A vacant structure offered the rare opportunity for the design team to start the rehab project

from scratch. Kahn, president of the Coconut Creek, FL-based Kahn Architectural Design Group, said that although the building was drab, nondescript and low to the ground, its H-shaped footprint provided an excellent pattern from which to work.

Working with Avante and Joerns staff, the Kahn architectural team utilized the existing building footprint and kept the basic circulation flow the same – with one key exception, Kahn said.

“The previous design lent itself to the nursing station being located in the middle of the housing ward, which separated the ward into different areas,”

ABOUT THIS SERIES

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SMART MOVES

he explained. “We wanted it to be one area, which was actually in the original design. So we put it in an offset position so that nurses could view both ends without cutting up the housing area. This helped us develop a neighborhood style and community feel.”

A ‘blank canvas’

Dickmann admits that gutting the entire building was not his original intent, but as the project progressed, “it got to the point where everything had to be dismantled.” Senior Interior Design and Project Manager Terri Prokop and Cathy Dickmann, interior coordinator and wife of Dean Dickmann, took full advantage of the “blank canvas” of a building.

“Cathy and I started by envisioning a variety of ways to renovate this empty building and we narrowed it down to some very good ideas,” Prokop said. “Cathy provided the concepts and details for the final product and gave wonderful insight regarding the design for the elderly, and other sources.”

The Prokop-Dickmann design duo selected furnishings and colors that convey a homelike atmosphere for residents. “Two notable pieces are a theatrical player piano and ornate game table, which give the facility a nice residential touch,” Prokop said. On color scheme, the team steered away from the typical aqua-pink pastels so common in Florida décor in favor of a more earthy style of sage and beige.

“It provides a Midwestern feel for a Florida facility that is a refreshing change from the usual pastels,” Prokop said.

The color palette, along with wrought iron, dark wood and stonewall accents are among Avante’s favorite design aspects.



Many of the new touches are intended to make residents feel more at home.

“There isn’t anything that doesn’t match—it all fits together.”

Dean Dickmann, Avante Group President and CEO

“Those touches are the frosting on the cake,” Dickmann said. “There isn’t anything that doesn’t match – it all fits together so beautifully.”

A helping hand

As a single-source supplier, Joerns provided about 90% of the facility’s furnishings in resident rooms and common areas, said Corporate Accounts Vice President Chris Dancu. By being in charge of ordering, coordination and logistics, Joerns’ efficiency helped streamline and speed up the renovation process, he said.

“We started with space planning, established a partnership and worked with the client to do it all,” Dancu said. “We did everything possible to appeal to them in terms of dollars and resources.”

Avante at Ocala has won raves for its appealing cos-

metic design, but function is just as important as form, designers say. Avante seized the opportunity of an empty building to install the very latest in electronic infrastructure for the facility, including wireless communications, information technology, an advanced fire safety system and state-of-the-art rehabilitation equipment.

Patient rooms have modern flat-screen TVs and soft music is piped in throughout the facility. “It is very nice background music that creates a relaxing environment,” Dickmann said.

But while music is heard overhead, staff paging is not. It’s all part of a conscientious effort to project an image of hospitality, not a hospital. The nursing stations have granite countertops and feature a more open design to foster a social environment while still maintaining privacy requirements. Visitors

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1 Gutting a building can be an intimidating challenge. But the resulting “blank canvas” may offer more options for improving function and design.
- 2 Finding a good partner can reduce headaches and greatly improve the final result of a renovation.
- 3 Build on the existing strengths that your community’s structure already offers.

are greeted by a concierge and offered coffee and tea.

“First impressions are important so when you first enter the lobby, you are greeted by a friendly face,” Dickmann said.

Architect Kahn’s use of windows in the common area rooms utilizes transparency in order to create a sense of community and encouragement, he said. “If you’re a resident going through physical therapy and see people watching as they walk by, it motivates you even more,” Kahn said.

As the original structure’s exterior had a low profile, Kahn designed modifications to give its outside appearance a more dynamic presence.

To its credit, Joerns “acted in true partnership with us – they were good listeners,” Dickmann added. “Our needs were not only met, but were exceeded.” ■

Coming next month

The next installment of **SMART MOVES** will examine ways to improve design on a budget.





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