



A publication for those who support the University of Minnesota Department of Pediatrics

## A brighter stay

Two dads are leading a charge to make children's hospital rooms a little more like home

Brian and Kristen Schepperle's daughter Katelyn Elizabeth was in and out of the hospital numerous times during her 10-year battle with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, a type of blood cancer.

"The doctors said they were going to do everything they could medically, but it was our job to keep her spirits up," says Brian.

So each time Katelyn went to the hospital, her parents loaded up their van with toys, a comforter, a laptop—anything they could think of to make Katelyn's hospital room feel more like home. "We probably looked like we were moving in," Brian says. "We wanted to make her feel as comfortable as possible."

Although Katelyn's leukemia overcame her at age 11, her parents say she kept a great attitude throughout her illness, and they believe the environment they created for her and the sense of control it gave her contributed to it. "Her attitude played a big role in her surviving as long as she did," says Brian.

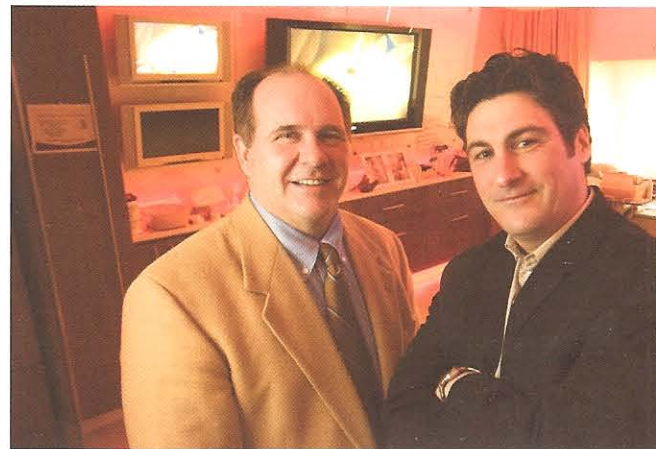
Soon after Katelyn died, he started thinking of ways to make a better hospital environment for other kids and their families. Having been through several long hospital stays with Katelyn, Schepperle knew firsthand that the small hospital rooms lacked privacy and the warm, lived-in quality of home. That wasn't good enough for families facing long stays.

### An idea comes to life

Then in the fall of 2004, David Millington approached Schepperle at a golf club where they are both members, knowing that Schepperle, too, had lost a child to disease. Millington's daughter Madison Claire died at age 2 of spinal muscular atrophy, a degenerative disease that attacks nerve cells in the spinal cord.

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Photo by Scott Strebbe



David Millington and Brian Schepperle



## Adopt A Rooms Continued from cover

Soon after they started talking, Schepperle shared his ideas for creating family-friendly children's hospital rooms: colorful, customizable, and bigger—with more space for parents and other family members.

Millington was instantly engaged. His family was all too familiar with the cold, sterile feeling of a typical children's hospital room: Dana Millington, Madison's mother, once had spent 63 consecutive days in the hospital with their daughter.

Just days after the two dads met, Millington shared Schepperle's idea with his neighbor, Chuck Knight, who worked for the architectural design firm Perkins + Will. Knight told Millington, "You can't just do a room—you have to do a whole floor."

From there, the idea quickly started turning into a reality. Millington and Schepperle asked a group of seriously ill children what they'd want in an ideal room. Among their wishes: better beds, video games, and a way to see outside. Then the two dads raised money through events and asked companies to donate equipment and other resources to help create two prototypes of their Adopt A Rooms—named to inspire other donors to sponsor additional

rooms—at the University of Minnesota Children's Hospital, Fairview.

### State of the art

The timing was perfect, Millington says. The University and Fairview were in the planning stages of building a new facility for their children's hospital and were excited about making these state-of-the-art Adopt A Rooms part of the plan. But more than that, the dads wanted to create a brighter experience for kids who are seriously or chronically ill—those for whom the hospital is a major part of their lives.

"When a child gets really sick, you want to go to the best place you can," says Millington. "And most of the time that is a research hospital like the University of Minnesota Children's Hospital, Fairview."

Schepperle agrees. Looking for the best care for Katelyn, he visited several top children's research hospitals across the country before moving his family from California to Minnesota in 1999. University pediatrics professors and pediatric oncologists Joseph Neglia, M.D., M.P.H., and John Wagner, M.D., treated Katelyn, and the Schepperles were impressed by their knowledge and expertise.

*A bedside console in the Adopt A Rooms, designed by Perkins + Will, gives kids control of their surroundings.*

Photos courtesy of Perkins + Will



So choosing to create the Adopt A Rooms at the University's children's hospital made perfect sense to Brian. "I felt that these docs were deserving of a world-class facility," he says.

Millington, for one, is proud of how far the idea has come in the three years since he and Schepperle met. "We're just a couple of dads," he says, adding that their wives have been their quiet partners through it all. "This was just what Brian and I had to do to ease our pain."

But they're not done yet. They hope that donors will come forward and sponsor Adopt A Room enhancements to all of the rooms in the children's hospital's new home. Transforming a patient room in the new facility into an Adopt A Room will cost \$300,000, which includes funding for upgrades and maintenance as well as a naming opportunity.

"Let's help some families," Schepperle says. "Let's make an ill child's time on this planet a little bit better."

To learn how you or your company can sponsor an Adopt A Room, please contact Elizabeth Patty at 612-625-6136 or [e.patty@mmf.umn.edu](mailto:e.patty@mmf.umn.edu).

## What's special about Adopt A Rooms?

All rooms at the new home for the University of Minnesota Children's Hospital, Fairview, will be private and family-friendly. They will be 390 square feet each, about 75 percent larger than standard hospital rooms.

All children's hospital rooms also will have sleeper sofas to make overnight stays more comfortable for parents. Additionally, the rooms will be equipped with kitchen tables, microwaves, and mini-fridges and will have in-room office areas to make them more like home, says Russell Williams, vice president of the patient experience at the hospital.

Adopt A Rooms will have all of those features, plus many others to help keep children occupied and comfortable. Plans for "adopted" rooms include large-screen TVs for watching movies, table space for playing games or doing homework, and even a way to explore the outdoors using a zoom camera on the hospital's roof.

Plans also include bedside consoles that children can use to control the lighting and color of their rooms.

"Children lose control of their lives when they are diagnosed," says Brian Schepperle, who with David Millington came up with the idea for Adopt A Rooms. "We wanted to give a little of that control back to them."

Since the first two Adopt A Room suites in the current children's hospital location opened in November 2006, they've been getting rave reviews from children and parents alike.

"Families really appreciate being able to stay together during their child's hospitalization, and children like the control they have within the rooms," Williams says. "The kids want all hospital rooms to be like Adopt A Rooms. Working together with the Minnesota Medical Foundation, we'll aim to grant their wish."

