

Mankato Clinic opens new children's health center

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Mankato Clinic physicians Katie Smentek and Don Putzier, along with a team of clinic employees, set out to make the clinic's Children's Health Center as kid-friendly as they possibly could.

About two years later, they appear to have accomplished that goal.

The center opened Monday on the Wickersham Health Campus, about 15 months after the clinic broke ground on the 56,000 square-foot facility. It features 30 exam rooms and specialty care, thanks to a Mankato Clinic partnership with Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare and Pediatric Therapy Services, along with multiple kid-friendly activities in the patient lobby, from books to an interactive floor.

"The design was geared toward children from beginning to end," Smentek said. "From the moment you walk in the door, you know that it's a kid-friendly, family-friendly place."

Smentek and Putzier were part of a group of Mankato Clinic employees that met multiple times a month during the project's early stages to help design the center. The group discussed details both large and small, from the design of the exam rooms to the locations of light switches and garbage cans inside the rooms.

Putzier appeared pleased with the center after seeing about nine patients Monday morning. "The design, I think, has worked very well with our patient flow and the services we need to provide to them," he said.

He and Smentek noted how the patients have separate hallways from the providers so they can



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An windowed, outside corridor leads to exam rooms at the new Mankato Clinic Children's Health Center. Photographs featured throughout the facility were taken by Sara Hughes, daughter of Dr. John Hughes, a physician at the Mankato Clinic. Photo by John Cross

avoid potentially stressful behind-the-scenes activity. "It's a very calming environment," he said, "which is important for the children."

The four hallways in the clinic each represent a different season and feature pictures from local photographer Sara Hughes. Capstone Press donated the books in the lobby's reading nook and is allowing kids to keep books they want.

Colorful seats, walls and games are spread throughout the lobby, which also includes a quiet waiting area and a mother's room for nursing moms.

The 10 Mankato Clinic providers at the center will work with about 20 Gillette specialists who will be there on a rotating basis. The clinic's partnership with Gillette will make it easier for southern Minnesota children with disabilities to receive the necessary care, said Patty Dunn, public relations manager at Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare.

"When Mankato Clinic was developing a concept for this facility, we saw it as a very natural collaboration for us," Dunn said. "For the most part, patients in Mankato had to drive up to the Twin Cities, but now they don't have to do that."

Both the clinic and Gillette will work with Pediatric Therapy Services to provide physical, occupational and speech therapy in the new facility. The clinic will also have a child psychologist and psychiatrist at the center.

The Mankato Clinic will host an open house at the center from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 11. The event will feature professional kite flying, games, tours, snacks and more.