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Pensacola medical facility panels reflect seaside vibe

Originally opened to the public in 1951, Baptist Hospital in Pensacola, Fla., is a community staple and the only locally based, not-for-profit hospital in the city. After more than 70 years of service, Baptist Health Care officials began planning efforts for a new campus that would include an updated hospital and an expansive outpatient facility known as the Bear Family Foundation Health Center.

The Bear Health Center encompasses 178,000 ft² (16,500 m²) across six floors and offers a wide range of patient services, including oncology, women’s health, bariatrics, cardiology, and more. Skip Yauger, senior vice president at project architect Gresham Smith, says the exterior design focused on a combination of durability and striking visuals.

Yauger says that the Gresham Smith team performed ample research in generating its design, asking the medical staff what would resonate with them. Responses consistently referenced Pensacola’s landscapes, beaches, and historic context, ultimately leading the architects to select precast concrete as the building material of choice.

Clay Hudson, project manager for GATE Precast, said that more than 40,000 ft² (3700 m²) of precast concrete was manufactured for the Bear Health Center project. The GATE team

produced two different types of panels: traditional architectural precast concrete for the podium and GateLite, a unitized, lightweight system, for the remaining exterior. By using this combination of panels, the Bear Health Center can withstand a category 5 hurricane while simultaneously boasting a design motif that is reflective of the surrounding natural environment.

“Precast’s resiliency and its ability to enhance speed of construction were major factors in us positively impacting this project,” Hudson says. “Our team was tasked with providing a repeating pattern of different finishes—brush blast, light blast, medium blast, and honed—and they knocked it out of the park, ensuring the right finishes were in the right locations.”

As you look at the building, intricate detailing in the precast concrete panels signifies the complexity and granularity evident in a Pensacola-area beach scene. But as you move your eyes up toward the windows, the scene becomes more expansive, much like where the horizon line meets the sky. Beyond this, the Bear Health Center also pays homage to the original hospital using precast concrete designed to look like terracotta, which was a major part of the 1951 structure’s design.

“I was a strong advocate for precast concrete from the beginning of the project,” Yauger says. “Precast gave us the flexibility to create a captivating and resilient exterior finish. The interest that you get with the different colors and textures in the panels is extremely effective.”

—Mason Nichols

The Bear Family Foundation Health Center in Pensacola, Fla., incorporates medical staff input into the design with precast concrete panels designed to withstand a category 5 hurricane. Courtesy of Chad Baumer Photography.

