

HEALING WITH NATURE, FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

Orlando VA hospital creates parking lot full of trees



The new VA Medical Center in Orlando, FL sits on 65 acres of land and encompasses a total of 1.2 million square feet. This brand new facility will provide inpatient care for veterans in central Florida and is designed to deliver holistic health services, with a site that includes a therapeutic courtyard, seating walls, planters, sports areas – and large, majestic trees in the facility parking lot.

The presence of trees strongly influences wellbeing, and are particularly important during the recovery process. A 1984 study in Science¹, “View through a window may influence recovery from surgery,” found that hospital patients with views of natural surroundings, like trees and other plants, had shorter postoperative stays than patients in rooms facing brick walls. Patients also received fewer negative evaluative comments from nurses, and took fewer potent analgesics during their recovery period. Studies like this, and others, suggest that trees can help care facilities like hospitals and treatment centers actually serve their patients more effectively and improve their health outcomes.

To ensure the parking lot trees at the VA Hospital will live for a long time, design firm MAI Landscape Architects specified the use of Silva Cells to provide each tree in the parking lot with 1,000 cubic feet of soil. That means that not only will hospital patients be able to look out on to a green area

rather than a bare stretch of asphalt, but also that the trees will help keep temperatures down and manage stormwater on-site, preventing excess runoff in to sewers and nearby watersheds. In addition to the benefits of the trees to those staying at the VA Hospital, the City of Orlando also has an ambitious tree canopy cover goal. Their aim is to increase their current level — 22 percent — to 40 percent.

In the meantime, 30 *ulmus parvifolia* (Chinese Elm or Lacebark Elm) now dot the parking area, creating a design that is healthier not just for recovering veterans, but for the surrounding environment as well.¹ Ulrich, RS. Science. 1984 April 27; 224 (4647) : 420-1.

Installation Summary:

Total bioretention soil per tree: 1,000 ft³ (28 m³)
Number of Silva Cells: 3,060 frames and 1,020 decks
Installation date: Spring-Summer 2011
Installation type: Integrated, trees and stormwater
Project site: Parking lot
Project designers: MAI Landscape Architects
Owner: Veterans Administration
Contractor: Eden Site Development

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