

'Fresh is best'

Hospital gets a garden

BY LAUREL BLACK

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Where others may have seen nothing more than an unused, muddy space between buildings on the Baptist Health Paducah campus, Jacob Miller saw potential.

Miller, who works at Baptist for its food services contractor, Morrison Healthcare, recently finished installing a vegetable garden between the hospital's cafeteria and its Regional Cancer Care Center.

"I'm a country boy, so gardens are in my heart," said Miller, a Ballard County na-

tive. "People love a fresh tomato from a hot vine."

The 17 raised beds in the garden boast more than tomatoes, though. Carrots, onions, peppers, green beans, squash, cabbage and other veggies are starting to push through the soil. Nearby, beds filled with flowers serve to draw pollinators to the spot.

The garden will serve as a tool for educating patients, children and other visitors on the benefits of healthy eating and how to make meals from fresh ingredients.

Having worked in food ser-

vices at four hospitals, Miller — whose official title is patient services representative — believes "food is medicine, and fresh is always best."

Baptist's dieticians work with various populations, including patients who are being treated at the Cancer Care Center. These patients often need to find nutritious recipes that appeal to them, as chemotherapy can interfere with their appetite and sense of taste.

"I thought this was the per-

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Jacob Miller, who works at Baptist Health Paducah for its food services contractor, Morrison Healthcare, planted a vegetable garden between the hospital's cafeteria and its Regional Cancer Care Center. The garden will serve as a resource for educating patients, children and others on the benefits of healthy eating.

GARDEN

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fect spot, being next to the Cancer (Care) Center. ... We can get our doctors involved, our patients involved, literally anyone who wants to be involved can walk out the door and walk through the garden," Miller said.

If the garden produces enough, the fresh vegetables will be incorporated into some of the hospital's cafeteria selections, although regulations prevent the produce from being used in patient meals, Miller said.

Some of the produce, Miller hopes, will be sold to help finance next year's garden.

"We're wanting to keep (the garden) in production as much of the year as possible," Miller said.

Although the project is a passion of Miller's, it took a team and several months of planning to make the garden a reality. A \$10,000 grant from Baptist Health Foundation Paducah played a crucial role in moving it forward.

"The garden is a great way to involve area families and children in learning about healthy lifestyle habits, such as proper food choices and exercise," said Lora Croley, director of phi-



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The vegetable garden between Baptist Health Paducah's cafeteria and its Regional Cancer Care Center includes an assortment of flowers like these coral bells.

lanthropy with Baptist Health Foundation Paducah.

"Education and outreach remain a priority in our efforts to combat childhood obesity and raise healthier future generations for our community. Our foundation is always happy to provide support for projects like these, which broaden our impact on the community."

Like all gardens, Baptist's also required people who were willing to get their hands dirty. This turned out to be Miller, along with a couple of his friends and co-workers.

"The week of building this was not the easiest week," Miller admitted,

laughing. "It was hot. It was sunny. My boss (Food Services Director Tim Andrea) and I cut all the wood (for the beds), put it together, and moved 10 tons of dirt."

An irrigation company will soon install a drip system in the vegetable garden; until then, Miller and other staff will continue tending to the plants themselves. He said it brings him a sense of satisfaction to watch the vegetables grow and to know he's contributing to community health.

"This was the way it was done many, many moons ago, and it's nice to have it back," he said of the garden.