

# Credit Union Times

## Search for identity leads Allegacy FCU to build park for cancer survivors

By Myriam DiGiovanni | Updated on April 30, 2002

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. – Pull up to Allegacy Federal Credit Union’s new headquarters and you’ll discover a breathtakingly sumptuous park dedicated to breast and ovarian cancer survivors. Allegacy Federal Credit Union President/CEO W.K. Keener says the idea came to him two years into building the new headquarters.

Faced with the reality of dealing with rainwater run-off by building a retention pond and headed to a conference, the CEO got lost on his way to the airport and happened on a small cancer park. Keener says from that moment he knew his credit union needed to expand on the pond and take it to “another level.”

“We have two goals in creating the park. First we want to heighten awareness of the importance of regular medical examinations so that more patients with these illnesses become survivors,” said Keener. “And our second goal is to lift up and honor those who have survived these cancers.”

According to AFCU Vice President of Marketing/New Business Cathy Pace, given the 80% female staff population, the odds are high that breast and ovarian cancer will strike close to home. Four years ago when AFCU was first looking for a cause to give back to the community, not only were three employees diagnosed with breast cancer, but one of Keener’s long-time friends died of ovarian cancer.

Built for both practical and more personal reasons, “The Park”, so named to represent the uniqueness of each individual’s experience, is located on the \$769 million credit union’s new 10-acre campus. In the center sits Allegacy FCU’s three-story 87,000 square-foot headquarters, developed by Atlanta-based KDA Financial, Inc. and designed by Summer/Wise & Associates Architects of Atlanta.

It holds approximately 150 employees and includes a financial center featuring such amenities as four drive-up teller lanes, one ATM lane, six teller windows, children’s play area, computerCaf, and hosts its CUSO Safe Passage Group, LLC. In addition, a gallery of artwork from North Carolina artisans is on display in the atrium lobby and conference and

break rooms are available for public use after hours.

To reinforce the theme of being a part of the community, the acreage surrounding the building not only accommodates parking for 245 cars but also has been landscaped with hundreds of trees and plants as a privacy buffer for surrounding neighbors.

Such beauty comes at a high price of \$20 million, which was entirely funded by the credit union, but Pace says the board, members and the community at large quickly embraced the project without question. “So far there has not been one negative comment about how much this must have cost or anything from anyone who has visited the park,” said Pace. “The usual response is ‘I’m so glad that I am a part of this organization’ and then some others have come up to let me know that they are breast cancer survivors too.”

“The Park” features the “Ponds of Hope” and a bronze sculpture “Alive, Beautiful and Victorious” created by internationally renowned sculptor and local native Earline Heath King. The ponds, one flowing into another via a waterfall, serve as a reminder that throughout life’s transitions, hope is a constant thread.

The first pond represents women going about their daily lives before cancer, the waterfall represents the rocky road women go through

during chemotherapy and treatment, and the lower pond represents survival and hope provided by early detection.

The ponds have been named in honor of two of the local leading cancer treatment hospitals, Forsyth Medical Center and Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center. Three local breast and ovarian cancer survivors of different ethnicities and ages were selected by the community to pose for the sculpture that is a focal point of the park.

The sculpture features the three women standing together in a circle with heads thrown back smiling. A credit union employee ended up naming the sculpture by describing how she felt as a cancer survivor—alive, beautiful and victorious. Designed by Stimmel Associates PA of Winston-Salem the remaining landscaping incorporates pink and teal flowers, which are the colors for breast and ovarian cancer awareness

“We felt it was important to make sure that each aspect, from the ponds to the landscaping, reflect a theme of hope for cancer survivors,” said Keener. The credit union has also designed a brochure filled with poems and inspirational stories regarding “The Park” with a photograph of the AFCU building in the center and has made it available on the Web.

“It has been said, ‘to love someone is to see the face of God,’” said

Keener. “Anytime we as human beings go through a personal crisis it is the love and support of the ones around us that sustain us. People facing breast and ovarian cancer need all the love and support this community can provide.”

Pace says the investment has a great return not only in terms of being a part of something so good but also the national attention. During the grand opening, survivors throughout the community have been invited to spread the “Seeds of Hope” by planting wildflower seeds as symbols of hope and inspiration.

Several members of the national media have already contacted Pace to cover the event. “People are using it,” said Pace. “Last week a couple brought a quilt and a sketchpad while having lunch in the gazebo.”

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