

ashlyn dyer aquatic center

Special project team working
to raise funds for therapy center

by Christina Vanoverbeke



A team at St. Joseph's is working to raise funds to build a new aquatic therapy center for patients at St. Joseph's and in the community who would benefit from this valuable rehabilitative therapy.

Christina Kwasnica, MD, the team's physician champion, says because Barrow Neurological Institute has one of the Southwest's leading rehabilitation programs, it needs this valuable therapy resource.

"Barrow neurorehabilitation needs this pool to continue to help our patients with spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, and other illnesses and injuries," she says. "The aquatic environment unlocks muscle spasms and allows for a feeling of weightlessness, which is both therapeutic and enjoyable."

One family's lead gift

The center will be named the Ashlyn Dyer Aquatic Center after a young woman who was the victim of a hit-and-run accident while running through the Presidio in San Francisco in March 2006.

After spending 10 days in the hospital on life support, Ashlyn passed away as a result of her severe traumatic brain injury. She was 27 years old.

The Dyer family lives in California and Phoenix and decided they wanted to leave some kind of legacy for Ashlyn in both places. They started the Ashlyn Dyer Foundation in California to help raise awareness about traumatic brain injury and have made a generous lead gift to Barrow Neurological Foundation's campaign to build the Ashlyn Dyer Aquatic Center.

"Phoenix has been good to us. A lot of the money that's been given to our foundation comes from

Phoenix, and we want a chance to give it back," said Ashlyn's mother, Marsha Dyer.

Marsha says that Ashlyn was an avid swimmer and that if Ashlyn had lived, she likely would have been using the pool at Barrow as part of her rehabilitation.

Why aquatic therapy?

Therapeutic exercises performed in water can be beneficial for a variety of individuals with musculoskeletal and neuromuscular disorders. Aquatic-based therapy augments traditional land-based therapy by offering an ideal setting to initiate treatment for patients who have weight-bearing restrictions, difficulty controlling the torso, which is needed for balance, or excessive pain that is exacerbated by the pressure of body weight.

Resistance from the water during exercise provides a safe environment for addressing strengthening, movement, and postural retraining.

Clinicians at St. Joseph's attempt to incorporate aquatic-based interventions into treatment plans for patients of all ages with a variety of diagnoses: stroke, brain injury, spinal cord injury, back pain syndromes, injuries requiring restricted lower extremity weight bearing, and other musculoskeletal dysfunction.

Existing pool problems

While Barrow has a pool used for aquatic therapy, clinicians' attempts to fully utilize these treatments are hindered by some problems with the pool:

- The location of the current pool on 7th Avenue is not close to any of the rehabilitation treatment areas: the Bruce and Deborah Downey Neuro

Rehabilitation Center, the Center for Transitional Neurorehabilitation, or Outpatient Rehabilitation. This means patients often must board a van and be transported to and from the pool—a task that can be difficult and that wastes critical rehabilitation time.

- The design of the pool area is not conducive to sessions during the summer months because it is not enclosed, leaving patients exposed to the elements. Therefore, the pool is utilized only a few months out of each year because of extreme temperatures. It also may be shut down abruptly due to storms.
- Another drawback to the existing pool is that it was not designed for therapeutic use and so does not accommodate people with special needs. For example, it does not have all of the special lifts, sloped floors, or sunken ledges that would make using the pool easier for rehabilitation patients.

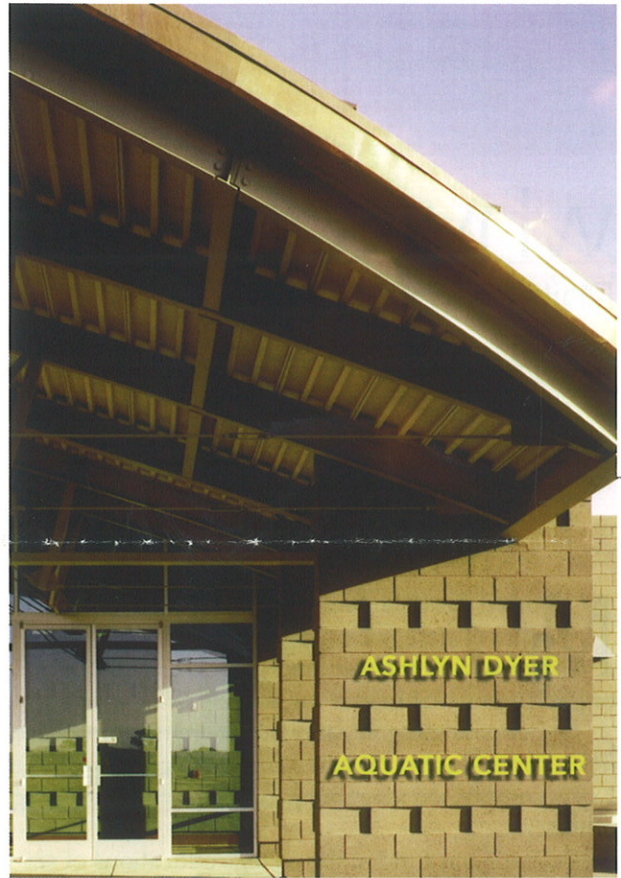
Help build the new center

The Ashlyn Dyer Aquatic Center for rehabilitation services at Barrow will be tailored to fit the needs of the patients using it. Some of the planned features for the center include:

- Perhaps most importantly, an enclosed and climate-controlled facility for use year round.
- Two lifts so more patients can get in and out of the pool at the same time.
- Stairs customized to suit individuals with special needs. The current pool was once a hotel pool and has short, steep stairs that are difficult to use.
- A different pool cleaning system that is safer for patients. Chlorine-based systems can be dangerous to special-needs patients because toxic fumes often collect near the water's surface, resulting in individuals breathing them in during therapy.
- Locker rooms to allow patients and families to change on site.

The Ashlyn Dyer Aquatic Center also would serve more than the inpatients and outpatients needing neurological rehabilitation at Barrow. The new proposed location on the south side of Merrell Street could conveniently serve Children's Rehabilitative Services, Parkinson's patients, orthopedics patients, the Arthritis Foundation, and Ryan's House, a palliative and hospice care facility for children.

Members of the project team include co-champions E. Jeffrey Walsh, Christina Kwasnica, MD,



and Kathy Kramer; Sr. Madonna Marie Bolton, Greg Anderson, Steve Ast, Kelly J. Barr, Phil Coyle, Marsha and Bruce Dyer, Gee Gee Entz, Bill Gullekson, Christina Hall, Renee Johnson, Herman Orcutt, Tom Reahard, Guy Inzalaco, and Michelle M. Matiski.

"Aquatic therapy offers yet another dimension of care for patients with many different diagnoses," says Kramer. "Once built, the Ashlyn Dyer Aquatic Center will offer an important component for people needing rehabilitation services. I'm so proud of the members of the committee who are dedicated to raising the money to see the project through from start to finish."

For information about how you can contribute to this important initiative, including available naming opportunities, please call Barrow Neurological Foundation at 602-406-3041 or email Kramer at Kathy.Kramer@CHW.edu. ■

